

Recommended code of practice for the care and handling of farm animals

Horses

THE CODES OF PRACTICE:

The Codes of Practice are nationally developed guidelines for the care and handling of different species of farm animals. Codes are not intended to be used as production manuals; instead, the Codes are designed to be used as an educational tool in the promotion of sound husbandry and welfare practices. The Codes contain recommendations to assist farmers and others in the agriculture and food sector to compare and improve their own management practices.

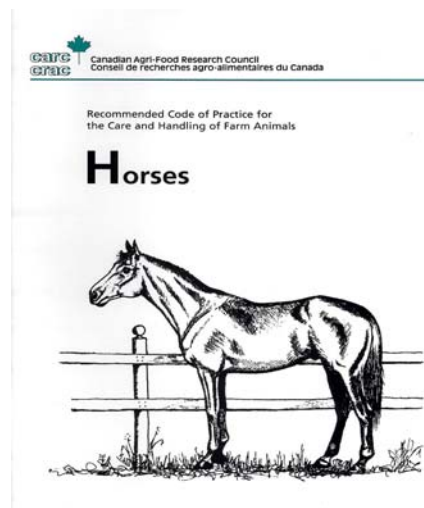
THE HORSE CODE:

Horses have been domesticated for thousands of years. Throughout the world, horses are kept in a wide variety of situations. In Canada, the commercial and private horse industries are large and extremely diverse. Therefore, the Code of Practice does not claim to be comprehensive for all situations, but endeavours to define high standards for the basic principles of horse management. The recommendations in the Code of Practice are based on the best knowledge currently available.

This Code of Practice, developed in 1998, is voluntary. Provincial and federal acts and their regulations must always take precedence. Where the word “must” is used, it emphasizes the importance of a specific practice.

This factsheet highlights only a small amount of the information found in the complete Recommended Code of Practice.

A copy of the complete Code of Practice can be obtained from your provincial equine association or through the CARC homepage, www.carc-crac.ca.



HIGHLIGHTS:

Management skills and responsibilities:

- The purpose of this Code is to promote the welfare of horses. Those involved in the horse industry must make an effort to inform themselves and others in the proper care and handling of horses.
- People working with horses must have due regard for their welfare.
- People involved in the horse industry should be aware of the welfare of horses under their care or the care of others.
- It is the responsibility of people working with horses to be knowledgeable of the proper care and handling of horses. Ignorance is not acceptable as an excuse for cruelty and neglect.

Shelter and horse facilities:

- The design and use of shelter facilities should promote the health, well-being and good performance of horses throughout all stages of their lives.
- Natural or constructed shelter areas must offer adequate protection from adverse weather conditions.
- Horses should be provided with a clean, dry area for lying down. In all types of housing systems, horses should be free to stand up or lie down comfortably at all times.
- Stall size should be calculated in relation to the size and weight of the animal.
- All stables/housing should have emergency evacuation capabilities, including more than one available exit.

Feed and water:

- Horses should receive a daily diet that is adequate for maintaining health. Horses should be fed on a regular schedule.
- When horses are fed in groups, enough manger space or feeding points should be available to minimize competition for feed.
- Every horse must have access to a sufficient supply of potable water to meet its individual maintenance and activity needs. A horse's daily water requirements range from 20 litres (4.5 gallons) to more than 36 litres (8 gallons).

Pastures/yards:

- Horses on pasture/range should have access to sufficient quantity and quality of feed and water.
- Properly maintained pastures may provide all or most of the nutrient needs of horses. Supplements should be provided, when necessary, to offset shortfalls in pasture quality and quantity.

- To prevent digestive and health problems, horses should be gradually introduced to pasture, especially in springtime.
- Horses on pasture should be inspected regularly, paying particular attention during high-risk periods (e.g. seasonal change, foaling, introduction of new animals to the herd).
- Horses on pasture should have access to well-drained resting area and to a natural or constructed shelter to protect them from adverse weather conditions.

Handling:

- Horses should be handled quietly, with care and patience, to avoid injury, pain or distress.
- Handling and restraining devices must be used humanely and with regard to the horse's natural movement, temperament and physical capabilities.

Health management:

- Horses should be inspected frequently to ensure that they are healthy.
- A parasite control program should be established in consultation with a veterinarian. This will include the administration of anthelmintics (dewormers) and manure and pasture management.

Identification:

- Permanent identification is an essential aspect of the horse industry. Horse owners should use the least invasive method of identification that is effective.

Reproductive management:

- Reproductive management should be based on several factors, including size, age, health, previous performance and genetic potential.

Transportation:

- Each person involved in the preparation of horses for transport and in the transporting of horses by any mode should be knowledgeable about horse behaviour, adhere to the principles of animal welfare and comply with appropriate regulations.
- The transportation of horses from point of origin to a final destination should be completed as safely and quickly as possible. Vehicles used to transport horses should provide for the safety of horses and personnel.
- Each animal must be able to assume a natural stance standing with four feet on the floor and have a full range of head and neck motion without touching the deck or roof of the vehicle or container. As a guide, it is recommended that there be at least 2.5 cm (1 in) of clearance for each hand of horse height at the withers.

- Horses should not be rushed during loading and unloading. In a new situation or location, all normal, healthy horses are alert and investigative. Consequently, every change or disturbance in surroundings, such as noises, breezes, sudden movement of objects and/or flashes of light, should be avoided. Abrupt movements by drivers and loaders should be avoided.

The complete Code of Practice contains sections on :

- Auction Markets and Sales
- Slaughter
- Feedlots

The Pregnant Mare Urine (PMU) industry is a unique segment of the horse industry. A copy of the **Recommended Code of Practice for the Care and Handling of Horses in PMU Operations** can be obtained from the Manitoba Department of Agriculture, 545 University Crescent, Winnipeg, Manitoba, R3T 5S6.

All Codes are presently developed by a review committee made up of representatives from industry, animal welfare groups, veterinarians, animal scientists, federal and provincial governments and interested individuals. The following are some of the groups that provided input at various stages of the development of this code.

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| ● Canadian Council on Animal Care | ● Nova Scotia Equestrian Federation |
| ● Canadian Food Inspection Agency | ● Ontario Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs |
| ● Canadian Federation of Humane Societies | ● Ontario Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals |
| ● Canadian Veterinary Medical Association | |
| ● Alberta Agriculture | |

In 1995, the Canadian Agri-Food Research Council (CARC) and its Canada Committee on Animals and its Expert Committee on Farm Animal Welfare and Behaviour, took the lead, along with Canadian Federation of Humane Societies in updating existing codes and developing new commodity codes.

Further information on the process of Code Development can be obtained from the Canadian Agri-Food Research Council (CARC), Heritage House, Building 60, Central Experimental Farm, Ottawa, Ontario K1A 0C6.

Request for copies of the Codes can be addressed to the national or provincial organization or through the CARC homepage: www.carc-crac.ca.

This factsheet was prepared by Penny Lawlis, Animal Care Specialist, Ontario Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs with assistance of an Editorial Committee. Animal welfare factsheets have been printed and distributed through the financial support of your provincial agriculture department.