



For immediate release:

National Farm Animal Care & Welfare Conference Highlights Developments in Farm Animal Welfare

September 30, 2007 (Ottawa, Ontario): The National Farm Animal Care Council (NFACC) held its first Farm Animal Care & Welfare conference September 20 - 21. The conference provided a broad view of farm animal welfare initiatives underway both domestically and internationally, with insights into trends for the future. Agriculture & Agri-Food Canada's Advancing Canadian Agriculture and Agri-Food (ACAAF) program provided funding for the conference, which is part of the project '*Initiating a Farm Animal Care Council.*'

The audience and speakers represented a diverse mix of farm animal care interests. Edouard Asnong, NFACC Chair, opened the conference, "We all share in the responsibility to improve farm animal welfare, so we all have a responsibility to educate ourselves in order to make sound choices. Hopefully this conference provides information that will assist in that process." He also noted that NFACC arose from a desire for a national, coordinated approach on broad issues related to farm animal care and welfare.

Jackie Wepruk, NFACC Coordinator provided information on the history, current activities and future direction for NFACC. An updated process for developing Codes of Practice for the care and handling of farm animals will soon be test piloted with funding received through the Federal ACAAF Program. Dairy Farmers of Canada will revise their Code based on the new process. More information is available at www.nfacc.ca.

Several international speakers from Europe, New Zealand and the United States provided their perspectives on approaches underway to improve farm animal welfare. Cornelius Rhein, representing the European Commission, provided an overview of the EU's Community Action Plan on the Protection and Welfare of Animals. He noted that animal welfare was campaign driven, and not strategic, until the introduction of the action plan in 2006. "Regulating certain housing conditions has proven to not be a useful approach." The EU is now moving toward outcome-based indicators of animal welfare.

Jean-Marc Bêche, with the National Federation of Dairy Producers in France, advised industry, "Listen to animal protection groups, but do not think they are bigger than they are." He provided an interesting overview of the French dairy industry approach to dairy welfare, along with information on the International Dairy Federation's *Guide to Good Animal Welfare in Dairy Production*.

Dr. John Webster, Professor Emeritus University of Bristol, described research showing, "there is no evidence that current welfare assurance schemes are delivering higher welfare." Farm Assurance schemes can become pieces of paper to be filed away between inspections. "We need to reward producers." Webster noted that welfare schemes only become effective if they are part of a dynamic strategy to ensure and improve standards. To this end he described the 'Virtuous Bicycle', "a cycle of information transfer between the accreditation authority and the public that sets out quality standards and provides honest evidence to indicate how well the scheme is working."

Dr. David Bayvel, World Organization for Animal Health (OIE) - Animal Welfare Working Group Chair, closed the first day with information on the OIE's role in animal welfare trends and developments. "Animal welfare will be a process of evolution, not revolution. Ownership and buy-in from animal users is needed." He noted

the increasing importance of ethics within farm animal welfare, but advised to not overlook the role of animal health within animal welfare.

Janice Swanson, Director of Animal Welfare at Michigan State University, opened the second day of the conference. She provided an overview of farm animal care and welfare approaches in the United States, outlining ongoing challenges and the goal for the future: “innovative systems that will provide an acceptable quality of life for farm animals, achieve sustainable production, and produce affordable, safe and socially responsible products.”

Terry Williams of McDonald’s Restaurants of Canada Ltd provided a food service perspective. He outlined McDonald’s ongoing efforts and ‘win-win-win’ philosophy, noting that the entire food chain should actively work on developing viable alternatives.

Mike Siemens, of Cargill Beef, outlined initiatives within the producer and processing sectors to address farm animal welfare concerns, outlining ‘philosophies of moral effort.’ He summarized three issues for the future: 1) to what extent do producers act on achieving moral standards for their animals? 2) Do current/proposed industry standards meet/exceed moral standards? 3) Do/will those outside animal agriculture support and encourage current moral action, and further encourage and reward practices ‘above and beyond’ standard moral duty?

Two panel discussions focused on regulated and non-regulated approaches on farm animal care and welfare in Canada. The panels were an encompassing overview of Canada’s existing farm animal welfare infrastructure.

The panel on non-regulated approaches featured speakers from the Ontario Farm Animal Council, Alberta Farm Animal Care Association, Canadian Federation of Humane Societies, Canadian Pork Council, and Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada. Each speaker provided an overview of their organizations non-legislated efforts and future direction to improve farm animal care and welfare in Canada.

The panel on regulated approaches included speakers from the Canadian Food Inspection Agency, Ontario Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals, and Ontario Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs. Speakers outlined Canada’s provincial and federal regulations aimed at assuring farm animal welfare, including strategies for the future.

Dr.’s Dan Weary and John Webster closed the conference with presentations that reviewed the challenges inherent to addressing farm animal care and welfare. Dr. Weary posed the question, “What is animal welfare?” He suggested three overlapping components to animal welfare. “People *and scientists* have different conceptions of what is important: affective states, basic health and functioning, and natural living. These concerns have deep cultural roots; the pursuit of one concern should not be at the expense of others. Animal welfare is an ‘evaluative concept’ which is both science-based and values-based. When professionals deal with these concepts they need to draw on both science and values.”

Dr. Webster described the challenge as one of awareness, education and promotion of farm animal welfare. For the animals this means increased productivity and welfare; for consumers, greater trust and satisfaction; and for producers more pride and survival.

NFACC’s Farm Animal Care and Welfare Conference drew over 140 participants. More information is available at www.nfacc.ca.

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Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada (AAFC) is pleased to participate in the production of this communication. AAFC is committed to working with our industry partners to increase public awareness of the importance of the agriculture and agri-food industry to Canada. Opinions expressed in this document are those of the Canadian Animal Health Coalition and not necessarily those of AAFC.



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