



The National Farm Animal Care Council (NFACC) provides a forum for communication and collaboration among all partners in Canadian animal agriculture, focusing on responsible farm animal care.

Website: www.nfacc.ca

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Organizations Represented on NFACC

Agriculture & Agri-Food Portfolio (AAFC, CFIA)
Canada Mink Breeders Association
Canadian Bison Association
Canadian Cattlemen's Association
Canadian Federation of Agriculture
Canadian Federation of Humane Societies
Canadian Hatching Egg Producers
Canadian Meat Council
Canadian Poultry & Egg Processors Council
Canadian Pork Council
Canadian Restaurant and Food Services Association
Canadian Sheep Federation
Canadian Veterinary Medical Association
Chicken Farmers of Canada
Coalition of Provincial SPCA's responsible for animal welfare law enforcement (BC, SK, ON)
Dairy Farmers of Canada
Egg Farmers of Canada
Equine Canada
Ontario Trucking Association, Livestock Haulers Division
Provincial Agriculture Departments
Provincial Farm Animal Councils (OFAC, MFAC, FACS, AFAC)
Research Community
Turkey Farmers of Canada

NFACC Information Update: November 2009

Summary of Welfare Quality conference, "Delivering Animal Welfare and Quality: Transparency in the Food Production Chain," October 8-9, 2009 in Uppsala, Sweden

What is Welfare Quality?

The European Union (EU) launched a Welfare Quality (WQ) Project in May 2004. The five-year project "is to provide practical science based tools and strategies to improve the welfare of farm animals." 39 institutes and universities from 13 countries are involved, with a total budget of 17 million Euros. The OIE is an active participant on the project.

The objectives of the project are:

- 1) To develop practical strategies/measures to improve animal welfare
- 2) To develop a European on-farm welfare assessment standard
- 3) To develop a European animal welfare information standard
- 4) To integrate and interrelate the most appropriate specialist expertise in the multidisciplinary field of animal welfare in Europe

The Welfare Quality conference, "Delivering Animal Welfare and Quality: Transparency in the Food Production Chain," held October 8-9, 2009 in Uppsala, Sweden was attended by approximately 250 people. Four Canadians were in attendance. Programme, proceedings, PowerPoint presentations and web cast of all speakers can be accessed at: www.welfarequality.net/everyone/43160/5/0/22

What was achieved?

- 12 criteria and four principles for animal welfare were identified
- Development and testing of animal based measures of animal welfare was conducted
- Examination and "proofing" of strategies for assessing animal welfare, including research to identify practical strategies to improve animal welfare (e.g., training courses, high fibre diet in pregnant sows reduces aggression)
- Improved understanding of consumer views of animal welfare (e.g., willingness to pay by is very limited, consumers consider "excellent welfare" having been achieved only for extensive systems, even if an intensive system meets all 12 welfare criteria)
- Interdisciplinary collaboration and relationships, along with relationships outside of the EU
- Standardized welfare assessment systems have been developed for seven livestock types: dairy cattle, beef cattle, veal calves, sows, fattening pigs, laying hens and broilers. The assessment systems have been published as 3 books.

What gaps were identified?

- Protocols for assessing animal welfare were limited to certain species and limited within species (i.e. production stage), so more work is needed
- Still have to fully develop each of the 12 criteria areas to populate with animal based measures for the species/production stages that were worked on

- Scoring of welfare measures is a value judgment (what is pass/fail, excellent/good). Scientists of WQ made that value judgement but no agreement as to whether this was appropriate. Some believe it should be a political decision.
- Recognition of WQ standards and acceptance within industry have not been achieved
- Options for auditor training and monitoring to ensure consistency have not been established
- Who bears the costs of the system? Producer/processor were seen as likely candidates
- Implementation of protocols and timelines involved – mandatory versus voluntary, time involved for assessment is still considered excessive (9 hours)
- Do assessment systems need to be comprehensive in what they measure or should the focus be on priority welfare issues?
- Research needed on options for implementation of WQ results

Challenges for the future:

- Implementation of the model (not at a practical level yet)
- Recognition of model and acceptance of it by farmers
- Training of auditors to ensure consistent delivery
- Ensuring model is cost effective (who pays?)

Suggested directions for a path forward:

- Integration of animal welfare assessment within other quality assurance programs to minimize duplication and make best use of resources (e.g., inspectors already in place, mitigates costs) – consensus on this point. The future of animal welfare is seen as part of the new ethical agenda focussed on food security and safety.
- Voluntary implementation, not mandatory, so as to show benefits to producers and further assess how the programs are working
- Resource and animal based measures need to be used in conjunction – cannot make a program completely one or the other.
- Debate around whether the focus should be on developing more programs for more species based on the WQ model, or fine tuning the existing programs developed in the project. Animal advocacy groups want more programs, but others felt the focus needs to be on perfecting the ones already created before delving into more.
- Development of an automated recording system was suggested to eliminate need for assessors to come on farm
- Assessment protocols are living documents that need upgrading on basis of new research and developments. Need to maintain support tools, ensuring solid acceptance amongst stakeholders.
- Need an independent organization/institution to manage assessment systems – European Centre for Animal Welfare suggested.
- Need to involve farmers more going forward – a two way conversation, not just “education”
- Welfare Quality II suggested, but no guarantees for funding. EU Action Plan on Animal Welfare ends in 2010 and a follow-up action plan was suggested as needed.

Lessons learned:

- Strong stakeholder engagement needed at the beginning of the project, not the end (mainly related to producer involvement as it was recognized that if producers do not accept WQ outputs implementation will not happen)
- From a producer perspective, audits are stressful and time consuming. They are a snap shot of a farm, but some measures may not reflect much more than that (i.e., animals are not static within a system and there will be times when better or worse welfare exists – this cannot be controlled. There will always be anomalies that can affect a score).
- Programs must be simple and farmers must be involved in their implementation to ensure they are workable
- Involvement of economists is integral to ensuring the costs of animal welfare are considered

Other noted points from the conference:

- Androulla Vassiliou, EU Commissioner, provided an instructive view on the political perspective relative to animal welfare. The EU believes that animal welfare is linked to broader societal goals, including food safety and quality, environmental protection and sustainability, and enhancing quality of life. The aim is to ensure that EU farmers can market their products more easily and get a fair return for following good animal welfare standards. Transparent and understandable information is needed on animal welfare so consumers can readily identify welfare friendly products and make informed purchasing decisions.
- Harry Blokhuis, Welfare Quality Project Coordinator, noted that animal welfare became an issue due to missed opportunities in communicating about what was happening in animal agriculture. As a result animal production became inconsistent with the public's views and expectations. In Europe animal disease outbreaks and subsequent welfare slaughter events raised the issue of animal welfare in people's minds.
- Sarah Kahn, Head of International Trade Department for the OIE, said that the OIE wants veterinary services in member countries to have the legal authority to implement and enforce animal welfare standards.
- Keith Kenny, Senior Director for McDonald's supply chain in Europe, explained how smart companies position themselves in the "smart zone." A diagram was used to illustrate this concept. The "smart zone" is just ahead of the public acceptance curve, which is just above the legal compliance curve. The public expects big companies to operate above legal requirements.
- Private standards were discussed and debated at length (to the point of overshadowing the purpose of the conference at times). Sarah Kahn (OIE) expressed strong concerns with private standards, suggesting they are often not transparent or science based. A GlobalGap representative in the audience suggested that their organization (a private sector body that sets voluntary standards for the certification of agricultural products around the globe according to Good Agricultural Practices – G.A.P.) has helped countries to access markets through certification and that all private standards cannot be judged the same. Others noted that OIE standards are not (and may never be) implemented in some countries and that no one verifies that they are in place and enforced anyway.
- The presence of GlobalGap at the conference may hint at an interest on their part in expanding their business into animal welfare assessment.