



NATIONAL FARM ANIMAL CARE COUNCIL
CONSEIL NATIONAL POUR LES SOINS AUX ANIMAUX D'ÉLEVAGE



Animal Care Assessment Framework

Dairy Test Pilot Summary

January 2014

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“Farmers are the people who are on the front line of delivering farm animal care every day,” says Caroline Ramsay, NFACC coordinator of the Animal Care Assessment Framework. “Their feedback in developing the assessment program is critical to make sure it is a workable approach that can be implemented effectively on farms across Canada.”



Introduction

Canada’s nationally coordinated approach to animal care assessment

The dairy Animal Care Assessment Program is part of Canada’s nationally coordinated approach to farm animal welfare through NFACC. The Animal Care Assessment Framework process was developed by NFACC as a platform tool that industry groups can use as a foundation from which to build their own species-specific assessment programs to demonstrate that Codes of Practices for the care and handling of farm animals are being followed.

Complete information on NFACC and the Animal Care Assessment Framework process is available at www.nfacc.ca.

Feedback critical for workable animal care assessments

Dairy sector takes charge with first test pilot using the NFACC Animal Care Assessment Framework process

Canada’s dairy sector has become the first industry to test pilot an Animal Care Assessment Program based on the new Animal Care Assessment Framework process.

The program test pilot was conducted during the months of May and June 2013 at 37 volunteer dairy farms across the country, in a process delivered jointly by Dairy Farmers of Canada (DFC) and the National Farm Animal Care Council (NFACC) with a team of coordinators, assessors, validators and producers. Veterinarians and a range of dairy advisors also contributed to this project.

Supporting program development

The purpose was to evaluate the draft Animal Care Assessment Program that was developed for Canadian dairy farms using the framework process developed by NFACC. An Animal Care Program Development team made up of dairy farmers, researchers, technical expertise, an animal welfare assessor, an animal welfare group representative, a food service representative and a veterinarian collaborated to create the draft program. There was a strong emphasis on gathering feedback from the producers in an on-farm pilot of the program to support a workable approach. Results were then considered by the Animal Care Assessment Program development team and adjustments to the draft program were made as part of a series of planned next steps toward a finalized program.

While a second test pilot is not part of the NFACC framework process, DFC wants to be well prepared before delivering the program across Canadian farms. DFC is planning to conduct a second pilot project involving more farms during 2014. Targets are to then finalize the program and begin implementation during 2015-16, followed by full implementation including formal assessments on all Canadian dairy farms during 2017-18.

Good for animals, practical for farmers

The first animal care assessment program test pilot was conducted successfully and yielded a wealth of insights.

In general, the feedback from test pilot participants was positive and supportive of the objectives. This included a consensus that animal care assessment programs need to provide value to farmers and the animals under their care.

These results will support the design of a finalized program that meets the goal of syncing what's good for the animals with what works for farmers – two elements considered essential for an effective approach that can be implemented successfully on all Canadian dairy farms.

Part of DFC's proAction Initiative

Dairy Farmers of Canada (DFC) is designing the Animal Care Assessment Program for implementation as part of its new proAction Initiative. The aim of this initiative is to provide uniform nationwide delivery of validation for milk quality, food safety, animal welfare, biosecurity, traceability and environment, by combining these components under the existing infrastructure for the Canadian Quality Milk (CQM) on-farm food safety program.



Wally Smith
DFC President

“The proAction Initiative is about integrating on-farm programs for a new generation, in a way that is efficient, works well for the animals and producers, and addresses societal expectations,” says Wally Smith, DFC President. “We believe we need to be proactive in addressing changing needs and responding to consumers’ thirst for knowledge about their food. We also believe that we, the farmers, should have a strong role in designing the program in a way that is efficient, practical and supports good farm management. The board and our members see the opportunity to streamline and coordinate various best management practices under one umbrella.”

Summary findings

Feedback at a glance

Bottom line findings of the Dairy Test Pilot

The dairy test pilot generated a range of feedback from farmers and validators that was considered in full detail by the development team. Overall results can be boiled down to these viewpoints:

The program is on track. Feedback on the draft program was generally positive and supported the notion that fine tuning rather than major change is required to get it ready for next steps in the process.

Producers support the need for this program. There was clear consensus from farmers participating in the pilot that this type of Animal Care Assessment Program ‘needs to be in place’ on all farms and has value for the industry.

Efficiency is a key priority. It’s important for producers that the time and work involved with participating in the program is efficient. They generally felt the draft program took some extra work and time but was not overly burdensome and was useful. However, as further improvements are considered it remains a key priority to look for any additional ways to lessen the extra time and work involved for producers while upholding an effective, high-quality program.

Education and training are critical to success. There was strong agreement that the program will require a period of education and training for producers, assessors and coordinators alike.

Parameters need some fine tuning. The program includes a major focus on “outcome-based” measures – i.e. concrete, measurable results – and this was generally well received by all participants. However, some details were identified as needing greater clarity. For example: 1) The question of what is an appropriate sample size for assessment, and 2) The question of who should be the person responsible for taking measures for body condition, injury and lameness measures.

Need to keep cost down and minimize paperwork. This was the major concern cited throughout the pilot. Not to say it’s too costly or has too much paperwork now. But in the interest of keeping the program as efficient as possible, this should always be a clear objective for continual improvement as the draft program evolves toward the finalized version.



Questions and Answers

Q&A: The road to an animal and farmer-friendly program

Aligning welfare assurance with practical and efficient approaches

A key person involved with Animal Care Assessment for Canada's dairy industry is Ron Maynard, a P.E.I. dairy farmer and Vice President, Dairy Farmers of Canada.

He discusses the assessment program and the role of the test pilot:

Q: Why is animal care assessment needed?

Ron Maynard: This is part of a broader trend where customers and consumers in general are asking for more information about how food is produced. It's not good enough to simply tell them about our practices. We need to be able to prove what we are doing.

We are interested in providing assurance to our buyers in a number of important areas, including animal welfare. We worked with NFACC to develop an updated *Code of Practice for the Care and Handling of Dairy Cattle*, which captures how we manage farm animal care with responsible practices. The next step is to be able to prove dairy farms are following the Code. This what the Animal Care Assessment Program will do.

Q: What are the benefits for producers?

Ron Maynard: First and foremost, the Animal Care Assessment Program is about ensuring the responsible care of dairy cattle. This is not only what's right for the animals but it's important to the success of the farm, because healthy, comfortable cows produce more milk and of higher quality.

Our farmers are already committed to animal care and we have a lot of farmers out there doing a lot of good work to keep innovating. In all aspects of production, we need to always be in that proactive mindset of continual improvement to keep efficient and sustainable. Assessments will not only provide assurance to our buyers, they will provide an important tool to benchmark our progress and help us identify ways to keep getting better. This is true both at the level of individual farms and the industry as a whole.

Q: What are the major challenges and how are they addressed?

Ron Maynard: The greatest challenge is simplifying the process. Dr. Temple Grandin has said many times 'We manage what we measure' and that has been our focus. But the measuring needs to be done in a way that is not overly time consuming and is doable on all farms, whether there are 25 cows or 1,200 cows.

The Code of Practice has 64 requirements and 283 recommended best practices, which are ways that producers might meet the requirements. So that is a lot to measure.

To meet this challenge, a lot of the focus of program development has been put on identifying outcome-based, animal-based measures that can measure several Code requirements at once. This gets us down from 64 measures to potentially less than 20. We have had help in this regard from leading researchers to help identify and develop effective measures that can make the process as efficient and practical as possible, while maintaining a robust and credible assessment. We have come a long way and the test pilot feedback will help us improve further.



Ron Maynard, dairy farmer and Vice President, DFC

Q: How much weight should be given to these first test pilot results?

Ron Maynard: The results are very important because a lot of work has been accomplished on the program development. However we're also very aware that at this stage we are dealing with a very small sample size. We will review and make adjustments, then our plan is to conduct a second test pilot with more farms in 2014.

At all stages in the process, we want to make sure things are working well and if there are issues that arise that we need to spend more time and effort on we will do that. We will be able to speak more definitively about where we are after the next round but the indications so far are certainly very positive and promising. We are on track to meet the target timeframes for implementation that have been laid out.

Big picture

Assessments in the big picture

Meeting rising demands for transparency and assurance

The progress on animal care assessment reflects an evolution that is happening in many leading food production areas around the world.

It's part of an environment where people are more interested in where their food comes and want assurances that responsible practices are being followed.

Livestock industries, both domestically and internationally, increasingly face rising expectations not only for communicating how they do things but also to provide proof of those practices.

Proving responsible practices

A major factor in success that is recognized by the dairy sector and other livestock groups in Canada, is that consistency and common approaches across the country and across production sectors has many advantages.

This is also why NFACC members groups pursued the development of the Animal Care Assessment Framework as a nationally coordinated, common approach. And it is why the dairy sector has used this framework to develop its Animal Care Assessment Program.

Canada stepping up its game

One of the greatest benefits of this approach is the power it carries to communicate a clear and consistent message about how Canada addresses farm animal welfare.

This includes facilitating consistent communications along the value chain and between commodity groups, as well as effective communications to customers, the broader consumer marketplace and society in general, both domestically and internationally.

Building a strong future

The result of this process – an Animal Care Assessment Program for Canada's dairy industry – is recognized as a major building block toward a strong future.

It's about demonstrating industry standards. It's also about demonstrating a progressive, sustainable approach to animal care that everyone from farmers to consumers can support and have confidence in.

Learn more at www.nfacc.ca.

Addressing Domestic and International Market Expectations Relative to Farm Animal Welfare – a project made possible through Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada's Agricultural Flexibility Fund, part of the Government of Canada's Economic Action Plan.



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'Trust me' doesn't cut it anymore. Consumers today must have confidence that responsible animal care practices are being followed. This means rising demand to not only communicate this is the case but also to prove it through approaches such as assessment programs.

Milestones and targets

- 2013 – Conduct first test pilot, revise as needed, coordinate with existing CQM measures
- 2014 – Develop training materials, conduct training, conduct second test pilot
- 2015-16 – Bring the program to farms, start benchmarking, focus on helping “bottom 25 percent” of farms that have challenges
- 2017-18 – Finalize formal assessments and implement program on all farms

We manage what we measure. Assessment is also important to provide a tool for producers and industry to support good management. To be successful, producers must have confidence the standards and assessment approaches are workable and also established and administered fairly.