

BACKGROUNDER: REVISED CODE OF PRACTICE

Introduction

On March 6, 2014 the National Farm Animal Care Council (NFACC) released its revised Code of Practice for the Care and Handling of Pigs (Pig Code).

The 'Pig Code' for short, contains guidelines for the care and handling of pigs on Canadian farms throughout their lives. The Code represents three years of collaboration among producers, veterinarians, animal welfare representatives, including the Canadian Federation of Humane Societies, and animal scientists.

The hog industry has a long history of Codes of Practice with the first Pig Code being released in 1984. The second revision was completed in 1993 and now, 30 years from our first Code comes this new version. This history shows the continued commitment of hog farmers and the industry to the welfare of the animals in their care.

Why is a Code of Practice important?

All industries have standard practices which provide at a very basic level a social contract with customers. In animal agriculture, it's even more important because we are raising animals.

Consumers expect that animals used in food production are raised humanely, are treated respectfully throughout their lives and that the quality of life of those animals is a priority. Farmers have an obligation to not only meet those expectations but prove that they do.

The Code of practice is the industry standard for good animal care. It outlines practices that are acceptable to a diverse range of stakeholders and was developed based on reasoned, scientifically informed debate.

The Code, along with assessment, allows farmers a way to demonstrate their commitment to the welfare of their animals.

Overview of Code Process

The revised Pig Code is the result of three years of hard work by a 17-person **Code Development Committee (CDC)** and a seven-person **Scientific Committee (SC)**.

Code Development Committee includes:

- Producers
- Transporters
- Veterinarians
- Animal welfare organization (Canadian Federation of Humane Societies)
- Animal welfare regulatory enforcement body
- Retail and food service
- Processor
- Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada and/or the Canadian Food Inspection Agency
- Chair of Scientists' Committee
- Technical expertise (ex. Agricultural engineer)

Scientists' Committee includes:

- Canadian Veterinary Medical Association (2 representatives)
- Canadian Society of Animal Science (2 representatives)
- Canadian Chapter of the International Society for Applied Ethologists (2 representatives)
- Chair of Code Development Committee

The CDC is responsible for the content of the Code. This multi-stakeholder committee works together in an effort to understand the interests of all members at the table and develops decisions that achieve the best possible balance of all. Its decisions are informed by the work of the Scientists' Committee and are arrived at by consensus, i.e. everyone is reasonably comfortable with the decisions.

The SC reviews research on priority welfare issues identified collaboratively by the two committees to ensure the validity of the research reports but they do not undertake new research. The SC evaluates proposed practices based on three major parameters.

1. Biological functioning (health, productivity)
2. Affective states (how the animal feels – pain, preferences, etc.)
3. Natural living (ability to perform behaviours important to the animals wellbeing)

The final role of the SC is to develop a report summarizing research on the priority welfare issues which is then peer reviewed and submitted to the CDC.

Consultations

A formal public consultation was held for 60 days following release of the draft code from June 1 through August 3, 2013 and drew record public engagement. The CDC then reconvened to review the comments and discuss necessary revisions. The final Code was launched March 6, 2014.

Now that the Code has been published as final, an awareness campaign has been launched. The Pig Code will be implemented through the Animal Care Assessment as a component of the Canadian Quality Assurance Program (CQA).

Implementation

The Code of Practice includes both regulatory requirements and industry-imposed expectations defining acceptable and unacceptable practices and is a fundamental obligation related to the care of animals.

In addition to the Code, the Canadian hog industry implements a national Animal Care Assessment (ACA) within its Canadian Quality Assurance (CQA) Program. The current ACA is based on the 1993 Code and will be updated to reflect the new 2014 Code. All requirements in the Code will be assessed for compliance.

Every farm participating in the CQA program is subject to an annual assessment by a program validator. Farms that fail to implement requirements will be compelled to take corrective measures or risk loss of market options.

Many requirements are also enforceable under federal and provincial regulation.

In addition to requirements, recommended practices are also included in the Code. These are designed to promote producer education and encourage adoption of practices for continuous improvement in animal welfare outcomes.