



Position Statement - Impacts to livestock and poultry associated with unauthorized entry to agricultural premises

Introduction

The Council of Chief Veterinary Officers (CCVO) provides veterinary leadership to Canadian animal health and welfare networks on key and emerging issues and serves the public interest by providing strategic direction on animal health and welfare in Canada through scientific assessment, information sharing, and consensus building across governments.

In response to recent incidents of protest actions taking place at Canadian swine and poultry operations and the subsequent decisions of certain jurisdictions to develop legislation to address the risks related to activism on agricultural premises, the CCVO embarked on the development of a position statement. While the CCVO recognized the right to respectfully, and legally, exercise one's freedom of expression, this position statement highlights the animal health and welfare risks from unauthorized entry to agricultural premises, as well as other concerns including the health and safety of farm workers and the safety of the food they produce. While this position refers specifically to livestock and poultry, additional work is underway to include other farming sectors that may face similar challenges associated with activism efforts.

Position

The unauthorized entry of persons onto agricultural premises, particularly unauthorized entry into animal holding facilities, can place animal health and welfare at risk. Producers and industry partners work to protect and promote the health and welfare of livestock and poultry. Unauthorized entry to agricultural premises can negatively affect animal welfare and threaten animal health by introduction or spread of disease. Unauthorized entry also compromises the personal safety of farm families and their employees and threatens public health through the risks of zoonotic disease transmission and compromised food safety controls. The CCVO strongly discourages unauthorized entry onto agricultural premises, including for protests, as

such entry puts animal health and welfare, producers' mental health and wellbeing and public health all at risk.

Background

1. Canadian livestock and poultry producers value the health and welfare of their animals, their staff, and their families.
2. Canadian livestock and poultry industries have created and implemented extensive programs that outline the requirements and/or guidelines to promote animal health, protect animal welfare, and implement biosecurity best management practices. These programs also contribute to Canada's highly recognized food safety system. Producers adhere to these programs on a voluntary or mandatory basis, depending on the commodity.
3. A key principle of biosecurity programs is to limit human access to animal holding facilities to only those that are required to care for the animals (including required business such as maintenance workers). Unauthorized and uncontrolled access by other persons carries the risk of disease introduction to the animals or spread of disease within or out of an operation.
4. Livestock and poultry become adapted to appropriate animal husbandry practices and routine handling. The intrusion of new and unrecognized individuals can create a stressful situation for the animals. Increased stress may compromise immune systems, which can subsequently lead to unnecessary disease and negative animal welfare outcomes.
5. Introduction of disease to a herd or flock of animals can cause significant economic damage to a farm, a community, or even the country. Introduction of a foreign animal disease may result in market closures, which can affect the Canadian economy in the scale of billions of dollars.
6. Intrusion by unauthorised persons also presents a risk of introducing a contaminant adulterant that may pose a food safety risk or may compromise the food safety control programs that assure safety and quality.
7. Uncontrolled or inappropriate interaction with or removal of animals/deadstock from agricultural premises may carry risks to public health and safety (free roaming animals), other animals/wildlife and the environment by spreading of diseases off the premises, and depending on the jurisdiction may even be prohibited by legislation. Under certain circumstances, there may even be a violation of the Criminal Code of Canada.
8. Unauthorized entry of persons to agricultural premises compromises the personal safety and mental health of the producer, their families, and employees.
9. Unauthorized entrants to agricultural premises may put themselves and others at risk of contracting zoonotic diseases from livestock and poultry.
10. Unauthorized entrants to agricultural premises may put themselves at risk of physical harm if unfamiliar with livestock, poultry, equipment and layout of farming operations.

Adopted July 16th, 2020