



Guiding Principles for Animal Welfare

Executive Summary:

The Canadian Council of Chief Veterinary Officers (CCVO) is a national forum for inter-governmental discussion on animal health and welfare issues and policy in Canada. The CCVO, as a community of practice, has membership from all provinces, territories and the federal government.

The CCVO has developed a principle-guidance document, after extensive consultation with Chief Veterinary Officers (CVO) and articulates their collective understanding of the various expectations and approaches relating to the issue of animal welfare across the country. This principle-based document does not represent the position of the various federal, provincial and territorial governments. It is a reference to be used for the purposes determined in each respective jurisdiction as they address animal welfare issues.

It also recognizes that terminology may differ across jurisdictions, and the term “welfare” is used in context of broader animal care and well-being, compared to “protection” which is used in a regulatory context.

Given the critical role that each CVO plays in leading animal health in their respective jurisdiction, there is an opportunity and responsibility for the CCVO to be a unified voice with a goal of improving animal welfare in Canada. The compilation of the collective opinions and understandings of the CCVO is an attempt to provide a level of consistency in decision-making and perspectives brought forward in senior decision-making and discussions regarding animal welfare across the country.

In making decisions about whether or how to respond to animal welfare issues, it is important for CVOs to engage with each other in order to strive for a considered and consistent approach. It is also important for CVOs to communicate with parties involved, the driving factors for improving animal welfare across the country.

Guiding Principles:

- 1. Treating animals with respect is a foundational element for ensuring acceptable levels of animal welfare.***
- 2. Canadian veterinarians have a central role in responsive policy, programming and communications on animal welfare issues and as a profession we must encourage veterinarians to develop relevant knowledge and understanding of animal welfare to assume this role.***
- 3. Stronger collaborative working relationships among industry, federal, provincial and territorial partners, retailers, non-governmental organizations, veterinary associations, private veterinarians and academia are needed to provide for continuous improvement in Canada's animal welfare system.***
- 4. Enforcement of animal protection legislation should be timely and responsive and strive for consistent outcomes across the country.***
- 5. Decisions regarding welfare should balance scientific knowledge, professional judgement and societal values.***
- 6. National animal welfare standards (e.g., codes of practice) must be continuously updated and revised as new scientific data and technological advances become available.***
- 7. Transparency and education of the public on animal production practices and farm animal welfare are critical to maintaining and building public trust in Canadian agriculture.***
- 8. Continuous improvement of the agriculture sector's awareness about good animal welfare practices, animal science, and public expectations including compliance with national codes of practice, is needed in order to improve farm animal welfare and public trust in Canada.***
- 9. An effective animal welfare system in Canada must meet the demands of society while balancing the practicality of animal stewardship.***
- 10. It is important to work with social service providers to address psychological and social factors that contribute to animal protection incidents.***

Issue Overview:

Animal welfare in Canada appears to be receiving increasing public scrutiny. This has materialized as public trust issues related to food safety, animal health, environmental sustainability and marketing. This complex and challenging policy issue requires leadership with the understanding and balancing of many interests veterinarians can provide.

The concept of animal welfare and how animals ought to be treated is approached from various perspectives and influenced by a number of factors (e.g., scientific, economic, religious, cultural) resulting in a wide spectrum of views on what is considered ‘good’ animal welfare.

In Canada, there is a strong concern for the protection of animals, based on the ethical concerns of society. Consumers are requesting much greater attention to all aspects of animal use and are becoming increasingly interested in the origin of their food. The majority of producers have well established and appropriate animal husbandry practices in place and take care of their animals on a regular basis.

With greater urbanization and the intensification of animal production, far fewer Canadians have any personal connection with their animal-source food system. Consequently, the public has a limited understanding of farming and animal production. This disconnect makes it difficult to bridge the gap between consumer understanding and producer reality and to obtain solutions acceptable to both. Public demand may require government to respond to these expectations.

Unacceptable animal welfare situations in different jurisdictions have broad implications for the entire agriculture industry across Canada. Instances of animal welfare issues in one particular area have significant impacts on commodities all over the country and on agriculture in general. Cases of poor animal welfare can have a negative impact on the reputation of the country and industries. It can result in the loss of export markets, inability to gain access to new markets or additional conditions being placed on Canadian products for production purposes. As such, there is recognition of the need for increased collaboration on issues of mutual interest.

As part of this issue, the concept of ‘social license’ is brought to light – the need to build and maintain public trust to operate. Social license is like a stamp of approval that says ‘we trust you to do what is right’. It is a concept rooted in common sense. If the public trusts you to do the right thing, there will not be increased pressure for greater restrictions (e.g., legislation/regulations).

Social license has to be earned and then maintained. It is based on the belief that industry activities are consistent with the expectations and values of the society and marketplace in which they operate. It is something in constant flux, and it strengthens or weakens based on the level of trust each party has from the consumer.

The need to earn public trust is becoming increasingly important, especially in an environment with competing priorities and products, and new concepts relating to sustainability. Building and maintaining public trust is a necessary management framework for complex problems. In considering and determining the broad perspectives of society, it is essential to continually engage and interact with society.

International and domestic trade are increasingly becoming a driver for changing animal welfare standards. Corporations are beginning to require their suppliers demonstrate adherence to specific welfare standards as a condition of purchase. Importing countries are also beginning to demand demonstration of appropriate and/or higher standards.

As a result of these developments, there is an increasing expectation, both domestically and internationally, that animals are raised, transported and slaughtered humanely, and suppliers be able to demonstrate adherence to appropriate standards. Retailers in Canada have made significant shifts and are now demanding of suppliers, and imposing increasing pressure for improvement of animal welfare in Canada. In the future, it is likely that participation in assurance programs will become a requirement in order to participate or sell products in mainstream markets. Assurance systems must be monitored and audited to be credible.

A foundational component of a strong animal protection and animal welfare system is to have a sound legislative and regulatory framework in place – pieces that fall within both federal and provincial control. With a solid regulatory framework, there will be less pressure on governments and an increased public confidence in the ability of industry to meet societal expectations. The public expects that laws and regulations are in place to ensure animals are protected and treated humanely and responsibly.

But these measures alone are not sufficient. In addition to a strong legislative and regulatory framework, infrastructure, resources and other complementary tools (e.g., training, education, outreach and communications) would enhance the understanding of animal welfare issues and assist in the maintenance of public trust in the agriculture sector.

Some serious animal protection and welfare situations arise from animal owners facing symptoms of mental illnesses or stress. As jurisdictions move forward in addressing these issues, the provision of social services to producers and animal owners needs to be an integral component of the solution.

Clear and effective communication is necessary to build public confidence. Public trust is complex and is based on perception as much as, if not more than, science. To have trust, the public needs to believe industry shares their values and is committed to doing what is right. Industry organizations need to communicate their commitment to welfare clearly and effectively to build public confidence. Transparent systems of assessment and continuous improvement are needed to maintain trust.

Definition of Animal Welfare:

While there is no universally accepted definition of animal welfare, there is a growing understanding that animal welfare is multi-factorial. It encompasses both the traditional concept of an absence of suffering, and the concept of the presence of positive conditions.

Views on how animals should be treated are influenced by a person's values and experiences. The scientific study of animal welfare has also provided a sound basis to influence policy development, regulations and standards of animal care. There are also numerous means of assessing animal welfare, including, but not limited to, health, productivity, behaviour and physiological responses.

Canada is a member of the World Organisation for Animal Health (OIE), the international reference body for animal health, and is expected to meet or exceed all OIE standards for activities such as production, transportation, slaughter, the killing of animals for disease control purposes, population control for stray dogs and the use of animals in research and education.

The OIE defines animal welfare based on an animal's experience to cope with the conditions in which it lives. Good animal welfare requires disease prevention and appropriate veterinary treatment, shelter, management and nutrition, humane handling and humane slaughter and killing. The OIE definition continues to be referenced as solid and foundational by many CVOs across the country. This definition is outlined for reference purposes only. The guiding principles of OIE for animal welfare may also be referenced.

OIE Definition of Animal Welfare:

'Means how an animal is coping with the conditions in which it lives. An animal is in good state of welfare if (as indicated by the scientific evidence) it is healthy, comfortable, well nourished, safe and able to express innate behaviour, and if it is not suffering from unpleasant states such as pain, fear and distress. Good animal welfare requires disease prevention and veterinary treatment, appropriate shelter, management, nutrition, humane handling and humane slaughter/killing'.

‘Five Freedoms’ Principles:

The internationally recognized ‘Five Freedoms’ were developed by the Farm Animal Welfare Council (FAWC), an independent advisory board based out of the United Kingdom. These represent an ideal state, and provide further guidance in assessing animal welfare or developing standards or other tools.

Farm Animal Welfare Council’s Five Freedoms’ Principles:

1. *Freedom from hunger and thirst.*
2. *Freedom from discomfort.*
3. *Freedom from pain, injury or disease.*
4. *Freedom to express normal behaviour.*
5. *Freedom from fear and distress.*

Guiding Principles:

In order to address animal welfare issues in a consistent and balanced way, the following principles were developed to provide guidance to CVOs as they address animal welfare issues.

1. ***Treating animals with respect is a foundational element for ensuring acceptable levels of animal welfare.***

Animals are a foundational element of Canadian society and are used for the good of humanity, including food production, research, companionship, recreation and entertainment. However, this use carries with it a responsibility to ensure the respect and welfare of such animals to the extent feasible. Compassionate treatment of animals has been a long-held value in Canadian society. Animal owners and custodians have a duty to provide for the welfare of animals in their care, by attending to their physical health, mental health and behavioural needs. We also have a responsibility to avoid causing unreasonable or unnecessary pain or distress to animals affected by our activities.

Society’s view of treatment of animals has evolved over time and animal welfare standards need to keep pace with these changes as well as advances in scientific knowledge and good practice and available technology. It is important CVOs continue to actively engage in

discussion and communication of the responsibilities associated with the use of animals including the respect and promotion of responsible stewardship.

2. *Canadian veterinarians have a central role in responsive policy, programming and communications on animal welfare issues and as a profession we must encourage veterinarians to develop relevant knowledge and understanding of animal welfare to assume this role.*

As society alters and adjusts its attitudes about animal welfare, veterinarians are an essential interface for heightening public awareness and championing expectations. The conversation has moved beyond primary health, and veterinarians are fundamental in educating producers, industry and government officials in response to broader questions about an animal's well-being.

Veterinarians have an important role in developing public policy in the area of animal health and welfare. Their expertise is essential in bridging the gap and balancing the rights and interests of individuals against the greater societal good. These are difficult discussions because they go beyond the realm of science but venture into balancing of various interests. Increased veterinary expertise and perspective in policy making at multiple levels within both government and non-government settings may assist progress on this issue.

The CCVO is well positioned in delivering this messaging to the veterinary community about the increased role that veterinarians should play in advocating the need for strong animal welfare. It is important for the CCVO to emphasize the need to acquire more veterinary expertise in policy, programming and communications on animal welfare issues.

It is also essential that we utilize the veterinary infrastructure available in Canada. With five veterinary colleges throughout the country, there is an abundance of veterinary expertise to assist in improving producer education on animal welfare standards. As we move forward in addressing animal welfare issues, veterinarians should be at the forefront. Veterinary colleges must make the necessary investments in research, expertise and curriculum additions to address the demands relating to animal welfare.

The role that veterinarians can play in shaping public policy related to animal health and welfare should be highlighted in both the veterinary medicine curriculum and to new veterinary graduates. It is recognized that for the veterinary profession to play an active and influential role in animal welfare, students must, during their veterinary education and professional development, develop a good understanding of animal welfare and husbandry concepts and how these can be applied in the improvement of animal welfare.

3. Stronger collaborative working relationships among industry, federal, provincial and territorial partners, retailers, non-governmental organizations, veterinary associations, private veterinarians and academia are needed to provide for continuous improvement in Canada's animal welfare system.

The current animal welfare system in Canada has a number of strengths which include a:

- history of caring for animals and a tradition of good husbandry;
- strong science base to our decisions and good capability in animal welfare science; and
- system of various stakeholders working together with diverse roles and responsibilities (e.g., government, industry, veterinary professionals, non-government organizations and scientists).

Successful collaboration and co-operation are important to those involved in improving animal welfare in Canada. Continued dialogue will help to identify who is best placed to influence change and what information, knowledge, skills or messages are required to address the issue.

Over the past several years, the National Farmed Animal Care Council (NFACC) has been an active leader promoting farm animal welfare practices in Canada. NFACC has brought together a diverse set of stakeholders to develop Codes of Practice for the care and handling of farm animals; created a process for the development of animal care assessment programs; and provided a forum for open dialogue on farm animal welfare. The CCVO supports the work of the NFACC.

Despite the fact that not all CVOs have the lead on animal welfare in their respective jurisdictions, one of the biggest influences that the CCVO could have is to continue to be proactive in highlighting the acceptable and unacceptable animal welfare practices to the public, media and industry. In addition, the CCVO support the promotion of NFACC's national Codes of Practice for farm animals as animal welfare minimum standards to adopt or guide the legislative framework as well as current practices on farm. This leadership will help to mobilize those involved in animal care and welfare within respective jurisdictions with a target of improved consistency of animal welfare standards, while taking into account other important issues such as food security and biosecurity.

CVOs need to consistently promote ongoing collaboration as each stakeholder has an important role to play in the consistent national approach to animal welfare. Sharing information, ideas, activities and individual priorities will strengthen relationships among parties involved and will result in improved animal welfare across Canada.

4. *Enforcement of animal protection legislation should be timely and responsive and strive for consistent outcomes across the country.*

In Canada, the regulatory frameworks in provinces, territories and the federal government vary. However, consistent outcomes should be a priority across Canada. As animal health and welfare leaders, the CCVO can influence and articulate the need to deliver and enforce relevant legislation/regulations consistently across the country. In each jurisdiction, there must be accountability for non-compliance and an acceptance by industry that there is no tolerance for repeated violations of the system. Promotion of this message is something that CVOs, in their roles as animal health leaders, can deliver.

The national Codes of Practice are a reference standard for enforcement of farm animal welfare/protection. Irrespective of whether or not they are referenced as a guideline or enshrined in legislation/regulations, it is important for the Canadian animal industries to have a clear, consistent and predictable regulatory animal welfare regime that is practical, affordable and meets increasing societal expectations.

As regulatory frameworks are modernized, it is important to strive for outcome-based frameworks that are able to meet the evolving societal views. Emphasis should be on a collaborative approach with shared objectives, focusing on delivery of specific outcomes. There are instances however, where a more prescriptive approach may be required.

5. *Decisions regarding welfare should balance scientific knowledge, professional judgement and societal values.*

Currently across Canada, there are legislative and regulatory requirements in place that set the minimum standards related to animal protection and/or welfare. Enforcement of animal protection legislation should be responsive and timely to minimize no animal experiences undue suffering, neglect and fear.

Both international and domestic trade is increasingly becoming a driver for improving animal welfare standards. Countries are demanding demonstration of appropriate and/or higher standards related to animal welfare. In time, there may be a need for producers and processors to strive to move beyond meeting minimal animal welfare standards. Changes in attitudes and actions may be required to meet international obligations and the evolving social values of the international community.

6. National animal welfare standards (e.g., codes of practice) must be continuously updated and revised as new scientific data and technology advances becomes available.

Public interest and opinion in Canada continues to be influenced by the increasing information both positive and negative about animal welfare. Therefore, it is imperative that animal welfare standards continuously be improved, updated and revised as new data becomes available. Research capacity in animal welfare should be facilitated and enhanced in Canada.

A robust and consistent approach to animal welfare is part of sustainable development and is important in the protection of animal health and the productivity and competitiveness of the Canadian livestock and poultry sector. Ideally, the ultimate goal is to have a comprehensive animal welfare system in Canada that supports the welfare of farm animals, reflects Canadian values, and involves national standards that are informed by science. Additionally, the system would contain a suite of assessment and compliance tools which would assist in rapid and consistent correction as required. The proposed system would promote domestic and international confidence in the health and welfare of animals in Canada.

It is important for CVOs to encourage the timely revision and implementation of nationally recognized industry standards as society alters and adjusts its attitudes about animal care, or scientific and industry developments justify changes to existing codes of practice and legislation.

7. Transparency and education of the public on animal production practices and farm animal welfare are critical to maintaining and building public trust in Canadian agriculture.

Animal welfare is a concern that appeals to a wide public audience. With Canada being largely an urban nation, many consumers have little understanding of livestock lifecycles and/or what occurs on a farm. Consumers have a growing interest in how animals are treated on farms and in livestock facilities. This highlights the need for assurance in the broader system specifically that the standards are being met and animals are being treated well.

Animal products are widely used, and consumers are concerned about the way animals have been treated, particularly in the context of food production. Animal welfare can be confusing to consumers, many of whom have limited knowledge about today's farming practices and the impact of those practices on the welfare of animals. Improving consumer awareness and understanding of farm animal-related issues is critical.

Industry is increasingly expected to be more transparent on how animals are raised, transported and slaughtered so consumers are better informed about the agricultural industry in Canada. Examples such as having video streaming from production facilities, glass wall projects, virtual farm tours and other tools should be encouraged across the agricultural industry to provide factual information on how and why farm animals are raised.

8. Continuous improvement of the agriculture sector’s awareness about good animal welfare practices, animal science, and public expectations including compliance with national codes of practice, is needed in order to improve farm animal welfare and public trust in Canada.

It is essential to share information and experience within and among the agriculture sector and across jurisdictions to promote an improved understanding of animal welfare across Canada. Stakeholders must be informed about relevant codes of practice, industry standards, legislative and regulatory requirements, and compliance-promoting activities (e.g., assurance systems, telephone hotlines, formation, and certifications).

Education and awareness will hopefully minimize occurrences where animals are in distress. Industry organizations should continue cross-sector communication to ensure a harmonized approach. Support can be demonstrated through the sharing and promotion of best management practices and raising awareness of these standards to a wider audience.

Communication can be done through a variety of ways by each jurisdiction, including promotion of continuous education and training on farm of animal welfare and animal protection obligations. Producers should have access to simple, user-friendly materials, such as visual instructions and video demonstrations, to help with decision-making.

Animal care assessment programs should be developed and supported around a central element to demonstrate high animal welfare standards. National Codes of Practice should be promoted as models for compulsory animal welfare needs (i.e., requirements) as well as a guide for continuous improvement (i.e., recommended practices). Animal care assessment programs should involve veterinarians and other specialists with expertise in animal welfare in many aspects of program development and delivery.

9. An effective animal welfare system in Canada must meet the demands of society while balancing the practicality of animal stewardship.

Animal husbandry has a significant influence on the welfare of farm animals. In any production system, the knowledge, skills and behaviour of the people who care for animals are integral to the standard of welfare. There is also a high public expectation that acceptable euthanasia and slaughter practices are performed and practices are up-to-date and based on modern science with an emphasis on animal welfare.

While Canada’s animal welfare system must strive to meet the demands of society it is important to bear in mind that improving animal welfare outcomes can be costly, especially in the short-term. In an agricultural context, a significant amount of the costs associated with improvements in animal welfare will be borne by the producer.

Most producers have made determined efforts to ensure an acceptable level of welfare for their animals (e.g., through training, development of husbandry systems and feeding practices). However, the lack of general awareness of these practices and information at the point of sale currently limit the consumer’s ability to make an informed choice.

We need to ensure that we have the support of society as we work towards continuous improvement of animal welfare in Canada. CVOs in their respective jurisdiction can continue to message this as animal welfare issues are explored and addressed accordingly.

10. It is important to work with social service officials to address psychological and social aspects of animal welfare incidents.

Issues related to the mental health or distress of animal owners is frequently linked to animal welfare issues. For example, animal hoarding is often symptomatic of a serious mental health issue. Parties acquire more animals than they can care for and do not provide them with the requisite care. The mental health of the people in charge of animals is the critical link to many cases of neglect. The mistreatment of animals is often a symptom of another problem (e.g., relationship between abuse of animals and domestic abuse).

A stronger relationship between government agencies to provide support services for the human component of the animal welfare problem should be considered. There is a need for cross-communication between animal protection agencies and other forms of social services. Livestock owners/producers who earn their livelihood and identify their value to society by the animals they keep often do not recognize their inability to provide these animals with adequate care as they age, which leads to further serious personal implications to their own health and well-being when corrective action is required in order to ensure animal welfare standards are met.

As we strive towards addressing animal welfare issues in the respective jurisdiction, it is important to also be responding to the human component in these incidents (i.e., the personal

problems and difficulties of individuals that can result in animal neglect). It is important to work closely with our public health community and Chief Medical Officers of Health, as well as other stakeholders that may be involved (e.g., police officers, firefighters, municipal inspectors) when distress or mental health issues develop in animal owners, or physical limitations of owners prevent appropriate animal care.

On-going communication between government agencies and contact with support services to seek advice on how to best respond to the human element of animal welfare incidents are important components in addressing ongoing animal welfare incidents.