

# Farm Animals: Who Cares?

**Farmers & Ranchers:  
Caring for our animals 24/7**



Less than three percent of Canadians are involved with farming today. That leaves many people with questions about the facts on farm animals. No one knows better than the people who care for their animals 365 days a year.

As farmers and ranchers, we choose to work with animals because we enjoy it. Although farms and ranches are getting larger, they are still operated with the same care, commitment and values of the generations who came before us. Look inside to find out more about us and the latest on farm animal care in Canada.

## EVER-BETTER SOLUTIONS FOR AGE-OLD PROBLEMS

*Dehorning* of beef and dairy calves is done for safety reasons, for humans and animals.

Research has shown it can be done with less pain and distress when calves are young and horns have not yet developed. There are also many breeds of cattle now that are 'polled', which means born without horns. (fyi...both females and males can have horns!)

*Scanning a cow?* Branding as a means to identify cattle is being replaced in parts of Canada by ear tags with bar codes and radio frequency id.

*Beak trimming* is done to prevent laying hens from harming one another. Some people call it "debeaking" which might make you think that the whole beak is removed when that's not the case at all. The proper procedure is to remove just the tip of the beak. (Picture the hook on the end of an eagle's beak). Research into behaviour, nutrition and genetics continues to investigate if there are ways of eliminating the need for this procedure.

*Sheep tail docking* is done to prevent fecal material from collecting on the tail and hindquarters of sheep, which can lead to flystrike. Flystrike is a condition where flies lay eggs that hatch into maggots and attack sheep's flesh. Tail docking also makes it easier to shear the sheep.



Dr. Suzanne Millman is a researcher at the Ontario Veterinary College, University of Guelph, who is interested in assessing and improving the welfare of livestock and horses in "real world" situations. For example, she is researching different methods of dehorning cattle.

### What guidelines are in place for raising farm animals?

Farmers like any animal owners, must follow laws for humane treatment. Laws set minimum standards and are meant for prosecuting problems after they occur. Farmers have helped to develop voluntary "Recommended Codes of Practice for the Care and Handling of Farm Animals," in cooperation with animal scientists, government and many partners. The Codes spell out what's appropriate in the daily care and handling of livestock and poultry. They outline acceptable standards for:

- shelter and housing
- feed and water
- healthcare
- breeding
- animal identification
- handling and supervision
- transportation
- sales yard and processing facilities, and
- emergency procedures.

The Codes of Practice are internationally-recognized as models of responsible animal care and will continue to evolve. For more on the Codes, see [www.livestockwelfare.com](http://www.livestockwelfare.com).

### Blueprints for humane handling?

Did you know there are many people with full-time careers in farm animal care? Specialists dedicate their lives to improve humane handling for farm animals, on the farm, on the truck and all the way through to the food chain. Education programs on topics such as animal health and management, animal handling facilities and humane animal handling for farmers and others such as livestock truckers continue to develop.



Dr. Temple Grandin is a world-renowned animal handling specialist who has designed facilities and audits to improve farm animal welfare. Visit [www.grandin.com](http://www.grandin.com)

## Are controls in place to deal with farm animal abuse?

Yes, there are controls in place and they work on many fronts. Animal neglect and abuse are against the law. Farmers and ranchers, like all animal owners, responsibly care for their animals and adhere to many regulations, including the Criminal Code and provincial animal care laws.

Most farmers and ranchers are doing a great job caring for animals. But, sometimes the level of care or management of farm animals isn't what it should be. Farm groups in a few provinces have recognized this issue, and have developed their own peer service to help improve farm animal care. For example, Alberta Farm Animal Care has a confidential Action Line & Resource Team (ALERT) service. Anyone can call the ALERT 1-800 line to report animal care concerns. A response team member (farmer or veterinarian) checks the animals in question and provides help and advice to the owner.

The ALERT service works closely with the Alberta SPCA, contacting them immediately should the animals be in distress. In Alberta, the Alberta SPCA enforces the Animal Protection Act.

If and when there's a problem with farm animal care, Canada's farmers want to be part of the solution.

All animals have basic needs, like food and water, health, and quality of life. British researchers originally identified the "five freedoms" back in 1965. They've undergone some revision since then, but still form the basis for responsible animal care:

### The five freedoms now read:

- 1** Freedom from thirst, hunger and malnutrition – by ready access to fresh water and a diet to maintain full health and vigour.
- 2** Freedom from discomfort – by providing a suitable environment including shelter and a comfortable resting area.
- 3** Freedom from pain, injury and disease – by prevention or rapid diagnosis and treatment.
- 4** Freedom to express normal behaviour – by providing sufficient space, proper facilities and company of the animals' own kind.
- 5** Freedom from fear and distress – by ensuring conditions that avoid mental suffering.

We know these as the building blocks of good animal care and strive for continual improvement based on new and proven science.

## ► WHY DID THE CHICKEN CROSS THE ROAD? DON'T GUESS, ASK IT YOURSELF.

Understanding animal behaviour and needs is a very complicated science. Unfortunately, only animals in the movies talk, so we have to 'ask the animals' what's best for them through scientific animal welfare research. Just like many complicated topics, almost every housing or management practice we use on our farms have pros and cons. There's a reason the systems we have were developed, but always with trade offs and room to improve.

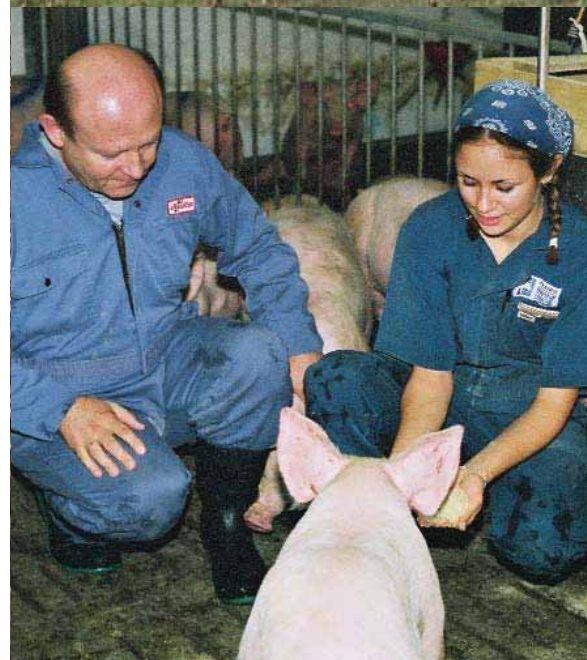
There are rarely easy answers to farm animal care questions. For example, in pig housing, we often trade off free pen space for individual pens. Why? Sows (female

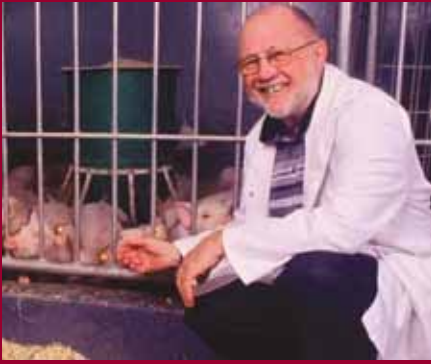
pigs) can be aggressive animals. Many pig farms choose to house sows in individual stalls so they don't fight or have to compete with each other for food or water. Research into new feeding systems and genetics that will help us eliminate animal competition is underway.

Dr. Harold Gonyou and his team at the ► Prairie Swine Centre are studying the complex topic of pig housing. His research has been helpful to the industry in designing and managing feeders, quantifying the effects of space allowance, and keeping sows and finishing pigs in large groups. Visit [www.prairieswine.com](http://www.prairieswine.com).



Meet Dr. Renee Bergeron, a professor of animal welfare and behaviour at Laval University, in Quebec. She's on the team that developed the on-farm animal care assessment program for Canadian hog farmers. This program has farmers document their animal care practices, which are then evaluated by a third-party expert, such as a veterinarian. The idea is for farmers to record their current methods, with help and advice on ways to improve. Several other farm groups are in the process of developing similar programs.





Meet Dr. Ian Duncan, a well-known researcher who has specialized in poultry welfare for many years, including the method of “asking” animals how they feel about the condition under which they are kept. He was instrumental in establishing the Colonel K.L. Campbell Centre for the Study of Animal Welfare at the University of Guelph. The objective of the Centre is to improve animal welfare through research and education.



Meet Drs. Tina Widowski and Cate Dewey, researchers at the University of Guelph. These scientists have been studying the handling and transportation of pigs, determining what practices are best to reduce stress for the animals. These researchers work hard to share their results to help improve farm animal welfare. For more information visit [www.aps.uoguelph.ca](http://www.aps.uoguelph.ca).

## A QUICK TOUR OF FARM ANIMAL REAL ESTATE

The two most common questions we get asked about farm animal care are about animal housing. Let's take a look at them in more detail.

### Why can't they have more space?

This is a very common question when people walk into a barn for the first time. The first thing we need to do is separate human needs from animal needs. This is tough. As people it's our nature to put our values onto other creatures to form opinions. However, every creature has different needs. A bat chooses upside down in a dark cave and a Husky dog might actually prefer to live outdoors in a snowy climate. Each type of farm animal is different too. It's not always a matter of more space, but what's available to them in that space and how they can use it. For example, if you put a group of calves in a very large open barn, research shows they would choose to sleep very close to each other and against the walls or gates for a sense of 'protection' and sometimes warmth.

The other reality is that it's a farmer's responsibility to care for animals that sometimes don't know what the best choice is. There are many accounts of turkeys drowning in rainstorms because they didn't know enough to go into the barn.

As farmers, our priority is to provide the best environment that we can for the animals in our care. It is always a balancing act between animal needs, safe food, environmental and economic realities. We invest in animal welfare research to help us learn what's best. Today's farm practices are definitely a combination of good science, practical experience and common sense.

### Why are most farm animals raised indoors in Canada?

Ask us this question in Winnipeg in January! Kidding aside, some grazing animals like sheep, horses and beef cattle do live outside with shelter, and access to food and water. However, many animals, like pigs and poultry, live in barns in Canada. Why, you ask? Barns are designed to provide the animals with the right environment, protected from extreme weather and temperatures, and of course the age-old problem of predators like wolves and coyotes.



Barns keep livestock cool in the summer and warm in the winter. Most have fans to help circulate the air. Did you know that some barns have water sprinklers to help keep their animals and birds cool and comfortable in hot weather? Another reason for indoor housing is for animal monitoring and care. It's much easier to ensure each animal gets the right food, clean water, and general care in a barn than when they are outside on pasture.



### THE GOOD OLE DAYS WEREN'T ALWAYS SUNNY

Storybook images of farm animals frolicking in the meadows block out the realities of extreme temperatures, wind and rain, unreliable food and water sources, and no protection from diseases and predators. Many farm animals are kept inside for the same reasons that many of us keep our pets inside: health, comfort, safety, food and water.



**Chickens & turkeys**—the ones raised for meat—are not raised in cages. While the birds can move around the barn, small groupings tend to stake out a territory, generally a few square metres.

The vast majority are housed in modern chicken and turkey barns, where temperature, humidity, light and ventilation are carefully monitored. Water and pelleted feed (like hamster food), made of grains like wheat, corn and soybeans are always available. The barn floor is covered with a soft bedding material of straw or wood shavings.

**Laying hens**—the ones who lay the eggs we eat—are mostly raised in cages in Canada. Each cage houses the number of birds that mimics natural groups. The term “pecking order” came from chickens, and in a small group, fighting is reduced as the birds determine the pecking order in the first few days. With mesh floors, their waste falls away, keeping the birds and eggs clean.

It’s a practical and clean housing system that offers benefits to the birds and farmers, and affordable eggs to consumers. Farm groups continue to invest money in hen housing research to evaluate what best suits the birds and to continually upgrade hens’ accommodation.



Meet Dr. Hank Classen. His team of poultry researchers at the University of Saskatchewan is investigating many animal welfare questions, including what truly happens when birds are transported and how to improve animal welfare on trucks.

### EAT LIKE A BIRD?

Did you know that an average chicken weighing 2.2 kg when fully grown will have eaten four kg of feed during its life? Are they “force fed?” It’s a common expression without much thought behind it. Chickens and turkeys are usually fed “free choice,” which means they can help themselves to the food or water anytime, buffet style.

### IF THE SKY IS FALLING, CALL THE FARMER!

Some farmers have an alarm system built into their barn control panel. If there’s a problem, such as the power going off or the temperatures getting too hot, the alarm can “call the house” or page them.



Meet Dr. Nigel Cook, Research Scientist with the Livestock Welfare Unit at Alberta Agriculture, Food and Rural Development. Dr. Cook measures the welfare of livestock by examining how their bodies respond to stress. He assesses housing conditions that may be a source of long-term stress for livestock. Dr. Cook is also working on early detection of diseases of farm animals.

### ► Did you know... taking good care of animals is taking care of business?

Many research studies have shown that improved animal handling reduces stress for animals and people, and results in higher quality food products.

### WHAT ARE “FREE-RANGE” EGGS?

Typically, free range eggs are defined as being from hens raised in large, open henhouses with access to outdoor runs. “Free-run eggs” are from hens raised in an open barn or layer house without access to the outdoors.

Of course it’s never simple or perfect. In some parts of Europe, where public pressure for egg production without the use of cages has led to legislation on different kinds of hen housing systems, old problems in the hen house, which the cage system addressed, are starting to reappear: elevated levels of dust and ammonia in the hens’ lungs, cannibalism among the birds, feather-picking and predators (including foxes!) in or near the hen house. It’s a delicate system that continues to be studied.



## The Real Veal

Veal calves are generally dairy bull calves. Veal calves live in one of three housing types: hutches, group pens, and individual stalls. Each method is well lit, insulated, and ventilated. They allow calves to move around and interact with one another, while protecting them from predators, parasites, and weather. Farmers raise veal calves two ways: by feeding a grain-based or milk-based diet. Milk-fed veal calves are raised on a diet that contains all of the essential nutrients for animal health and grow to be 205–227 kg. Grain-fed calves are fed a milk-based diet for the first six to eight weeks, after which they're gradually introduced to a diet of corn and protein. Grain-fed veal calves grow to be between 296–318 kg.

## Ever heard of bullying?

Traditionally, milk-fed veal calves have been raised in individual stalls to provide them with individual care and allow them to drink their milk without the fear of "bullying" from other calves. However, with today's technology, more veal farmers are raising milk-fed calves in group pens, like the one shown above, where the calves drink from an automated milk dispenser (almost like a giant milkshake machine). This allows calves to drink whenever they want and with less competition. See a real veal farm on [www.farmissues.com](http://www.farmissues.com).



**Beef cows and calves**—typically live on pasture in spring, summer and fall, with a diet of mostly grasses. Some beef cattle live outdoors year-round and are quite healthy with a thick coat of hair as long as they have a good supply of food, water and adequate shelter.

**Market cattle (finished cattle)**—are often moved to feedlots (a penned yard) from the open range and pastures for the final months before marketing. They're fed a high-energy diet of grains, corn or hay silage or hay. The consistent, high quality feed brings them to market weight faster than on grass alone.

**Dairy cattle**—live in barns that use one of three systems. The traditional tie-stall barn gives each cow its own stall with bedding and free access to food and water in a manger in front. Cows are milked in their stalls into a pipeline that goes directly into a big milk tank. Another design for dairy cow housing is called free-stall. These barns have large areas where cows move freely and go to a central milking parlour area twice a day. A few free stall barns have a robotic milker instead of a parlour. With a robotic milking system, cows can go to the robot to be milked any time they want to – 24 hours a day.

**Pigs**—many live in barns specially designed for pigs, with fans or curtain sides that can open if need be to help control humidity and temperatures. To keep the animals disease free, most barns have strict sanitation standards and animal health protocols. For example, some farms require anyone entering the barn to shower first or wear plastic boots provided by the farm.

**Sows**—usually birth 8–12 piglets in a litter, and give birth twice a year. Sows are put in special areas called "farrowing pens," just before giving birth and while they nurse their piglets. Some people have criticized small farrowing pens because it restricts the sow's movement. The reason for the pen design is to provide the best environment for both the large sow and the small piglets. The bars on the pen give the sow something to lean against when she lies down, and the piglets have a safe area to stay out of harm's way. The area where the piglets sleep can be kept warm with a heat lamp or heating pad.



## COW IGLOOS?

These are called calf hutches and are designed to keep calves healthy and comfortable. Hutches allow calves to be fed individually and reduce contact with other animals and 'bugs' that could be in the barn. Farmers give calves extra milk, feed and bedding in cold weather too.



▲ Meet Dr. Joe Stookey, who is a well-respected University of Saskatchewan professor. He is interested in cows' maternal behaviour and identifying farm practices that will help minimize and reduce stress and pain for cattle and other farm animals. Visit [www.usask.ca/research](http://www.usask.ca/research).

## COWS OF MANY COLOURS...



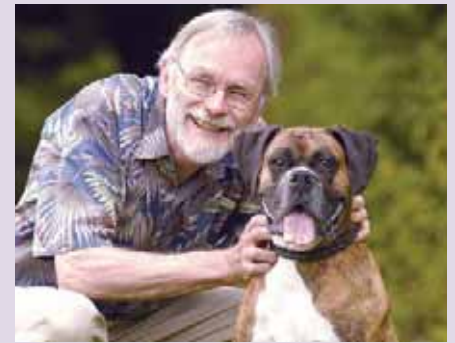
It's a surprise to many people, but cows come in different shapes and sizes or breeds. A Poodle is very different than a Husky dog, just like a Holstein is different than an Angus!

Dairy breeds tend to have thinner coats of hair and have less muscling than beef breeds, as they put all their energy into making milk. There are six common dairy breeds, including Holstein, Jersey, Ayrshire, Brown Swiss, Guernsey and Milking Shorthorn.

Beef breeds are more muscular and only produce enough milk for one calf each year (or occasionally twins!) Major breeds of beef cattle in Canada include: Angus, Charolais, Hereford, Simmental, Limousin, Maine-Anjou, Salers, Gelbvieh, and Shorthorn. Some beef farmers raise purebreds, but most have herds consisting of crossbred animals (combinations of more than one breed) to combine the best qualities of each breed.

**Sheep**—can be raised indoors and out. Some are kept out on pasture all year, with the help of supplied hay and grain during winter. Some shepherds prefer to keep their flocks in the barn year-round, to keep a close eye on lambs and keep predators at bay. Most farms use a mix of both systems.

**Goats**—dairy goats are housed and cared for like dairy cows, indoors for the twice-daily milking routine. Other breeds of goats are raised for meat and may be out on pasture, but need protection from temperature extremes and predators too.



Meet Dr. David Fraser, a world-renowned professor and one of the co-founders of the Animal Welfare Program at the University of British Columbia, which encompasses all aspects of animal well-being from research to international trade and ethics. The UBC team works together with many researchers across Canada and around the world, including Agriculture & Agri-Food Canada dairy cattle welfare researchers Drs. Anne Marie de Passillé and Jeff Rushen (pictured below). They are all dedicated to improving the lives of farm animals through research, education and public outreach. For more information, visit [www.landfood.ubc.ca](http://www.landfood.ubc.ca).



**AND SO MUCH MORE** - Tour a farm from the comfort of your own home and find out more about farming from fish to llamas at [FarmIssues.com](http://FarmIssues.com)

### NATIONAL CENTRE FOR LIVESTOCK AND THE ENVIRONMENT

Farmers like the Manitoba pork producers are proud to be major funders of the new National Centre for Livestock and the Environment, located at the University of Manitoba's Glenlea Research farm. This innovative "whole farm approach" research facility just south of Winnipeg will help farmers find ways to protect our air, water and land, while producing livestock and food in an environmentally sustainable way.





## Animal Welfare or Animal Rights?

Most people believe in animal welfare principles: humans have a right to use animals but also have a responsibility to treat them humanely. Farmers and ranchers live by these principles. By contrast, animal rights supporters don't believe humans have a right to use animals — whether it's for food, clothing, entertainment or medical research. It can be confusing for the average person to sort out the many positions and groups involved with animal care or use issues. Activists of any kind are not usually interested in finding solutions, but prefer to focus on problems and dramatic examples to generate funds and support.

As farmers, we're not interested in fighting with activists. We are interested in advancing responsible farm animal care. We're the ones that are out there 365 days a year caring for the animals. We support animal welfare research that generates real information, continue to improve our practices and hope that public education efforts help shine a light on what we really do—and do not do! If you want to know more about how we care for farm animals, please ask us.

*We appreciate you taking the time to learn more about what we do and how we care for farm animals in Canada.*



For technical information on farm animal welfare: [www.livestockwelfare.com](http://www.livestockwelfare.com)

[Livestockwelfare.com](http://Livestockwelfare.com)

For general information on farm animals and agriculture: [www.farmissues.com](http://www.farmissues.com)

[Farmissues.com](http://Farmissues.com)

**For more information, contact any of the groups listed below:**



[www.afac.ab.ca](http://www.afac.ab.ca)



Farm Animal Council of Saskatchewan Inc.

[www.facs.sk.ca](http://www.facs.sk.ca)



[www.mbfac.ca](http://www.mbfac.ca)



[www.ofac.org](http://www.ofac.org)

