

An Overview of the Animal Care Assessment Program

Animal care is a top priority for hog producers and organizations involved with the hog industry. In 1984, the *Code of practice for the care and handling of farm animals: Pigs* was published, outlining the requirements for the day-to-day needs of the animals in the various stages of production. This Code was further revised in 1993 and later an Addendum for early-weaned pigs was released to address specific care needs for these young animals. In 2001, a related Transportation Code was created. Additionally, provincial hog organizations have worked to create resources for their producers including documents to address on-farm euthanasia and guidelines for the humane handling of swine not fit for transportation.

These codes and guidelines provide information about recommended practices to producers and interested parties, but do not specifically address what is happening on the farm, nor do they provide any oversight of producer activities. Programs that include an audit or oversight activity have been implemented or are being developed in other areas such as food safety, environment and traceability. It stood to reason that a similar approach for animal care would be complementary to these other programs.

Legislative and voluntary approaches in the European Union and United States as well as processing plant animal welfare audits and discussions by Canadian retailers and the food service industry frame the global animal care environment. Canadian consumers have also weighed in through Ipsos-Reid polls conducted in 1999, 2002 and 2004 where animal care ranked in the top concerns for Canadian hog production along with food safety and environment.

In response to the changing global environment and identified concerns of Canadian consumers, the Canadian Pork Council initiated a working group in 2002 to investigate the development of an animal care program for Canadian hog producers. This working group included producers and producer representatives, researchers and government.

This group began its work through the examination of the approaches to animal care in other jurisdictions. This examination included looking at content issues, including a discussion on engineering / design based approaches versus performance / animal based approaches to the evaluation of animal well-being. The key challenges identified during this early work by the committee included the acknowledgement that there is no standard framework or guide to follow for development of animal care programs; there is no one-size fits all approach to animal care. While deciding upon design versus performance based evaluation, the committee needed to bear in mind what can be applied and implemented at the farm by producers to demonstrate their animal care practices.

With these things in mind, it was determined to build a program upon the strengths of the codes of practice and the food safety program already being implemented by a large proportion of Canadian hog production. It was also decided to blend engineering/design based approaches with performance/animal-based approaches in the development of an on-farm tool.

The objectives of this program would be to:

- Promote sound animal care practices on Canadian hog farms
- Provide a mechanism to demonstrate that these practices are being followed
- Build confidence throughout the supply chain and consumers

The program itself must:

- Have set minimum requirements
- Be repeatable, valid and reliable
- Use measurable tools (minimize subjectivity)
- Be educational and enhance awareness

- Have a validation tool that moves beyond education
- Be a blend of both evaluation of the pig and the process
- Be clear, cost effective, simple and transparent
- Build on the existing food safety program, CQA, to prevent duplication

The materials that had been developed by the working group were reviewed by the Canadian Meat Council, the Canadian Federation of Humane Societies, the Canadian Veterinary Medical Association and the Canadian Council of Grocery Distributors in 2004. These stakeholders supported the implementation of the ACA tool based upon this review.

In 2005, this voluntary program was launched as an advance version to raise awareness and generate interest. The materials are currently available in hard-copy through CQA provincial delivery agents and on the web site (www.cqa-aqc.com).

ACA Requirements

As with the CQA program, mandatory questions are identified in the materials by shading. These required areas include:

- To have copies of or access to the recommended codes of practice
- Non-slip flooring on loading ramps and in walkways
- Pathways and ramps must be free of sharp edges that might cause scratches or injury
- A documented standard operating procedure for the identification, care and humane treatment of sick or injured pigs
- Space where animals needing special attention can be isolated and treated
- A euthanasia plan for animals in different production stages
- Emergency plans to deal with power failures
- Pigs must have access to water
- Pigs must be fed daily to meet their requirements
- Equipment that may cause scratches or wounds must be promptly repaired or replaced
- Minimum space requirements
- Standard operating procedure for handling pigs with social behaviour problems

In addition to these required areas, the assessment tool includes a number of non-required questions including the training and assessment of stockpersons, angle of loading ramps, pig handling and devices used for moving pigs, air quality, transportation and body condition scoring.

Implementation of ACA

The delivery of the ACA tool will build upon the existing CQA infrastructure. The program will be delivered by the CQA delivery agency in each province, producers will be required to be on the CQA program in order to join ACA and validators must be trained CQA validators in order to become an ACA validator.

The animal care assessment tool is currently available to producers on a voluntary basis. To our knowledge, there are no conditions of sale requiring participation in or recognition of the ACA program.

Our focus at this time is to promote the implementation of the program. Our customers are looking for animal care assurances. As with the launch of the CQA program, the Canadian Pork Council and its members recognize that producers already face a number of demands on their time and resources. During these early days of implementation of the ACA tool, the evaluation of program implementation will continue to ensure that the tool is a useful one for producers to use to demonstrate their on-farm animal care practices.