

ANIMAL HEALTH & WELFARE

BACKGROUND

The health and well-being of cattle is the top priority for everyone involved in the production of Canadian beef. It is also a key area of concern for consumers. Canadians want to know that the food they are eating is from livestock that were well cared for. Over the years, great strides have been made to improve the welfare, quality of life and health of beef animals. High animal welfare standards are imperative – they lead to better animal health, and ultimately, a better product for end consumers.

KEY MESSAGES

- Farmers and ranchers are committed to the health and welfare of their animals.
- Beef cattle spend most of their lives outside where they are able express natural behaviors and live in a herd environment.
- When painful procedures are necessary, the goal is to make them as quick as possible, to manage the pain appropriately and to follow-up to ensure the animal has healed without complications.
- Farmers and ranchers work closely with veterinarians to implement pain mitigation protocols.
- Vaccines and antibiotics are essential tools to prevent and manage disease in beef cattle.
- The harvest process has evolved over the years based on scientific research to ensure both humane animal treatment and the safe production of food.
- The Code of Practice for the Care and Handling of Beef Cattle outlines requirements and recommendations to ensure the health and welfare of beef animals, while outlining potential avenues to improve current practices¹.
- Animal handling practices and equipment have evolved to reduce stress on cattle. For example, the squeeze chute is designed on animal behavior principles proposed by Temple Grandin, one of the leading researchers in animal handling and behavior, reducing cattle stress by providing a comforting squeezing feeling.
- Over 6,000 beef cattle farmers and ranchers have been trained in the VBP+ program, which includes guidelines for low-stress cattle handling and best practices for animal care⁵.

CONSUMER CONCERNS

A large majority of consumers say they support raising livestock for meat if they can be sure animals are well cared for². Overall, consumer knowledge of animal welfare practices on-farm is low. This provides the industry with a unique opportunity to share our story and demonstrate the hard work farmers put in day-to-day to ensure the health and welfare of their cattle.

Primary consumer concerns include:

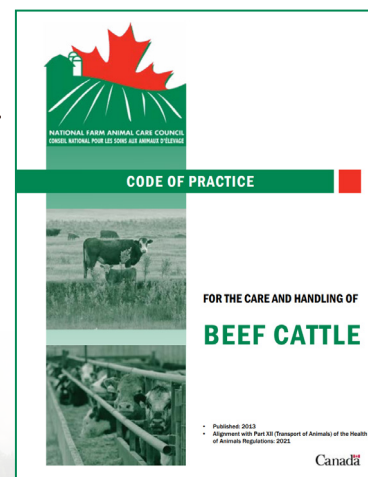
- Transportation and processing
- Painful procedures i.e. castration, dehorning and branding
- Feedlot conditions
- Animal care

Animal welfare is a topic that is highly researched so the industry can strive for continuous improvement. Research areas include disease prevention, pain mitigation, reducing stress, improving health through nutrition and much more.

Public pressure to avoid painful practices when possible, and to reduce pain when procedures are necessary, continues to build. As pain management research has advanced and new protocols have been adopted, farmers and ranchers have also seen the benefits to their animals first-hand.

THE CODE OF PRACTICE

The Code of Practice for the Care and Handling of Beef Cattle was developed by the National Farm Animal Care Council (NFACC) in conjunction with veterinarians, researchers, food industry experts, animal welfare groups and other stakeholders. It outlines required and recommended practices to promote best management practices and welfare for the care and handling of beef cattle¹.



The Code of Practice highlights the following areas of beef production:

- Animal Environment
- Animal Husbandry
- Feed and Water
- Transportation
- Animal Health
- On-Farm Euthanasia



HEALTH & WELFARE CONTINUED



THE FIVE FREEDOMS

Outlining five aspects of animal welfare under human control which must be upheld:

1. **Freedom from hunger and thirst**

Access to fresh water and a diet to maintain full health and vigor.

2. **Freedom from discomfort**

Provided an appropriate environment, including shelter and a comfortable resting area.

3. **Freedom from pain, injury, and disease**

Prevention or rapid diagnosis and treatment.

4. **Freedom to express normal behavior**

Provide sufficient space, proper facilities and company of the animal's own kind.

5. **Freedom from fear and distress**

Ensuring conditions and treatment that avoids mental suffering.

To those who care for livestock these freedoms tend to be intrinsic. Still, **demonstrating our commitment to these freedoms - and to continuously improving animal welfare as a whole - is important.**

The Code of Practice creates a baseline for beef cattle care and does just this.



CANADIAN ROUNDTABLE FOR SUSTAINABLE BEEF (CRSB) CERTIFICATION

Canadian Roundtable for Sustainable Beef (CRSB) has goals and a framework outlining the proper care for cattle on-farm. Sustainability requires healthy animals and a social license to operate.

Verified Beef Production Plus (VBP+) is a delivery agent for CRSB. Producers who are certified with VBP+ adhere to the requirements for CRSB certification, and also comply with food safety measures required by the VBP+ standard. A major part of the VBP+ program is awareness and implementation of the latest best practices for animal health and care⁴.

As of September 1, 2023, approximately 1.75 million cattle were under the management of VBP+ certified operations, and around 6,500 producers were trained in the VBP+ program. These producers are all knowledgeable about low-stress handling, pain management, high-quality cattle health protocols, and effective monitoring of cattle. Certified producers have been through a third-party audit to verify knowledge and implementation of these principles⁵.



1. Code of Practice for the Care and Handling of Beef Cattle (2013). National Farm Animal Care Council. <https://www.nfacc.ca/codes-of-practice/beef-cattle> (Accessed Jan. 24, 2024)
2. Public & Stakeholder Engagement consumer research, 2023. Conducted with Abacus Data. Available upon request.
3. Pain Mitigation. Beef Cattle Research Council. <https://www.beefresearch.ca/topics/pain-mitigation/> (Accessed January 25, 2024)
4. What is VBP+. Verified Beef Production Plus. <http://www.verifiedbeef.ca/about-vbp/what-is-vbp.cfm> (Accessed January 25, 2024)
5. Current VBP+ Statistics, Sept. 2023. <http://www.verifiedbeef.ca/about-vbp/current-vbp-statistics.cfm> (Accessed January 25, 2024)

*Please see other PSE factsheets on the topics of Transportation, Antibiotics and Hormones.