

Reports and Comments

Canadian code of practice for the care and handling of beef cattle

In September 2013, the Canadian National Farm Animal Care Council published a code of practice for care and handling of beef cattle that updates an earlier (1991) edition. Canada is a member of the OIE, the World Organisation for Animal Health, and in revising this code, the OIE's new (2012) guidelines for beef cattle production were kept in mind. The preface sketches out some aspects of the approach and philosophy: "This Code focuses on the animal. Where possible, it is outcome-based, and is intended to achieve a workable balance between the best interests of the cattle, producers, and consumers. It recognizes the basic principle that the well-being of cattle is a prime consideration and that cattle treated well benefit produce".

This code does not use the Five Freedoms to provide a framework but tackles the subject under five other headings. These are: environment, feed and water, health, transportation, and on-farm euthanasia. It is science-based and 55 references are cited. There are appendices on body condition scoring, nutrient requirements, calving — when and how to get help, assessment of fitness to transport, and secondary kill steps in euthanasia — bleeding out and pithing. There is a section listing sources of further information within Canada.

In each section, a brief introduction to the topic is followed by notes which specify requirements (including both legal obligations or industry expectations of what is acceptable), for example: "Dehorning must be performed only by competent personnel using proper, well-maintained tools and accepted techniques". Following this, recommended practices are outlined, eg: "avoid dehorning at the time of weaning to reduce stress". The dates and impacts of forthcoming legislative changes to the requirements are made clear eg: "Effective January 1, 2016: Use pain control, in consultation with your veterinarian to mitigate pain associated with dehorning calves after horn bud attachment".

Code of Practice for the Care and Handling of Beef Cattle (September 2013). A4, 68 pages. Canadian Cattlemen's Association (CCA) and the National Farm Animal Care Council (NFACC) of Canada. ISBN 978-0-9920910-0-2 (book), ISBN 978-0-9920910-2-6 (electronic book text). Available at: http://www.nfacc.ca/pdfs/codes/beef_code_of_practice.pdf.

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Review of stunning methods for poultry

Under the new EU regulation (1099/2009) on the protection of animals at the time of killing, the European Commission is obliged to review slaughter methods for poultry and to report on these to the European Council and Parliament. This is because the European Food Standards Agency

recommended, in 2004, the phasing out of water-bath stunning of poultry because of welfare concerns and the need, therefore, to review the feasibility, and advantages and disadvantages, of alternative methods. To inform these considerations, the Commission called for bids to review the scale of the use of water-bath stunners for poultry in Europe, the possible alternatives and their socio-economic and environmental impacts, and the feasibility of phasing out the use of water-bath stunning. The project was awarded to the Food Chain Evaluation Consortium, and its final report, submitted to the EC in December 2012, was published in October (see details below).

The report estimates that 5.8 billion broilers were slaughtered in Europe in 2011 and that 81% of these were stunned by the water-bath method. This method is used also for the majority of laying hens and turkeys. There has been growth in the use of controlled atmosphere stunning (CAS) but the water-bath method remains predominant because of economic and other factors (for example, CAS is generally not accepted for religious slaughter). The report expects a relative, but limited, further increase in the proportion of birds slaughtered using CAS as stricter requirements about the water-bath method, under Regulation 1099/2009, come into effect in coming years. Beyond that, it seems that to drive further change towards phasing out of the water-bath method would require additional incentives or a mandatory ban. Pointing to various difficulties foreseen with the latter, the report concludes: "On balance, and taking into account the imminent entry into force of Regulation (EC) No 1099/99, it is recommended that no further action in terms of a ban be taken at this point in time. The use of stunning systems should, however, be monitored against the background of the Regulation over a period of three to five years in order to confirm the evolution of the use of systems and to consider the development of further alternatives".

The report reviews various alternative methods and considers that: "Among the alternative methods examined, head-only stunning and LAPS (low atmospheric pressure system) are the only ones which appear to be close to commercialisation in the EU". It seems possible that the development of one or more of these or other alternative methods (with both welfare and economic advantages) might change the picture considerably in the future.

Study on Various Methods for Stunning of Poultry (October 2013). A4, 135 pages. Final report for the European Commission Directorate General for Health and Consumers (DG SANCO) prepared by the Food Chain Evaluation Consortium (FCEC) comprising Civic Consulting, Agra CEAS Consulting, Van Dijk Management Consultants, and Arcadia International. Available at: http://ec.europa.eu/food/animal/welfare/slaughter/study_stunning_poultry_en.pdf.

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