



ONTARIO PRODUCERS TEST DRIVE NEW ANIMAL CARE CODE

Veterinarians lead innovative hands-on workshops

Ontario beef producers are getting a jump on learning the new Beef Code of Practice. Across the province a series of innovative workshops are giving producers a look at the code in action.

Dan Ferguson, manager of producer relations for the Beef Farmers of Ontario says the idea was to engage producers. “We didn’t want the code sitting in a box somewhere. We wanted producers to understand what it was and how it would fit into their management.”

The bulk of the province will soon have been covered with workshops, he says and the response has been gratifying. He believes the approach provides useful knowledge about how producers will respond to expanding the Verified Beef Production program to modules including animal care.

REAL-WORLD EXPERIENCE

Workshops are held on a farm.

“Producers like the idea of going somewhere they are comfortable,” says Ferguson. “We work with the local county association to make it a bit of a social setting, a chance to visit. We pick a veterinarian who is good at presentations to actually run animals into a headgate and demonstrate proper techniques.”

“Farmers get to ask questions directly and see techniques first hand. Hopefully that means they will relate to the code as a management tool.”

LESSONS FROM THE CODE

Producers have a range of understanding on the new code. “Some have it figured out and are there to see how their association is explaining it,” says Ferguson. “But you can see some people thinking, ‘So somebody could actually come onto my farm and ask me about the new code and I’d have to show them and back up what I do with some sort of evidence?’”

“We’re able to show them that’s where transparency is at in our business and if you are meeting the code there are no issues.”

There’s a myth-busting aspect to this as well. Some producers come in wondering about how invasive the code will be. But they get to see that much of it is what good producers are already doing, and that it is not going to be an uncomfortable experience to implement.



Chute-side demonstrations hosted by Beef Farmers of Ontario help demonstrate responsible animal care practices.

LESSONS FROM OTHER INDUSTRIES

Ontario has a smaller herd size compared to some provinces so many producers have other jobs.

It’s interesting to see that many producers have experience with codes and standards in their other jobs, says Ferguson. So they are often more prepared to accept and work with production requirements in the beef business.

“One result of living in the shadow of Toronto is producers are close to the consumer. They know people drive down country roads, see something happening they may not understand that the farmer may have to explain.”

FUTURE PROMISE

One important lesson from these workshops is that producers will stand up for their industry. If someone questions the need for management standards, it is often that another producer will stand up and explain why it is needed.

“It’s why we want to keep these learning channels with producers open,” says Ferguson.