

*Another Point of View*

**One View of Farm Animal Care**

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The concept of animal care, as a specific discipline with a scientific foundation, emerged when veterinarians became involved professionally with laboratory animal husbandry on a full-time basis. This began over 40 years ago. Laboratory animal care is now a well-established branch of veterinary medicine with many practitioners in this research field throughout developed countries. While bringing the broad area of animal health into laboratory animal colonies, these practitioners had additional roles. Some of the latter involved the provision of technical and ethical advice. The maintenance of healthy, even disease-free populations remains the fundamental objective and responsibility of such veterinarians, regardless of any research participation. Humane and clinical interventions are of course a priority, should they become necessary.

Inevitably, preventative medicine became the umbrella covering the collective facets of the animal care discipline that has become established. The due transfer of the discipline from the laboratory to the farm has been seen as desirable by many observers of the animal industry for some time. Many elements already exist on increasing numbers of farms. Herd Health Programs, for example, are a parallel development sponsored by veterinary clinicians for as long a period of time as lab animal care has been developing. These programs involve scheduled veterinary visits for specific tasks in herd health protection. Laboratory animal care may be more intense or comprehensive, but one main difference may lie in the area of welfare. Lab animal veterinarians have long been at the cutting edge in the tumultuous revolution in ethical animal use, care and general welfare in research. A similar, though more constrained welfare evolution is underway in farm animal husbandry. It is all too obvious that animal care must be the means of rational implementation of welfare-related practices for farm animals.

The subject of farm animal behaviour has become mature and has been given a great amount of documentation for almost half a century. This subject is taught in today's curricula in animal science and veterinary medicine and it forms the rationale in farm animal welfare, allowing modern practitioners to use objective judgment in determining or assessing farm animal welfare. Again, in veterinary education the subject of preventative medicine has now more prominence and this strengthens animal care, as applied to farm livestock. All the nuts and bolts of this applied discipline are still provided in modern, traditional and conventional veterinary education, completing the requirements for comprehension and active participation in this field.

Animal care involves more action than debate in practice. Its Latin motto could be "Res non verba" (deeds not words). The practitioner needs to know the industry itself in order to be realistic while convincingly talking the talk and walking the walk (between deeds e.g. sampling blood, vaccinating, inspecting, clinical examining, recording). The ultimate objective would be to find each individual animal on the farm showing a state of "wellness". This term refers to freedom from any form of disease or infection, plus physical and behavioural well-being.

A federal government office has recently announced the intention to form some body relating to a farm animal care initiative. Some in the animal industry will recall the formation of an expert committee on farm animal welfare and behaviour about 20 years ago. It no longer exists. During its very long tenure it produced much debate, none of which apparently resulted in action. That may have been its role. Perhaps it was intended to be a straw body. The farm

industry and its animals deserve better, however, and another of the same will not be acceptable.

A plea is hereby made to the organizers of this new committee to structure it properly. Professional animal care people must be on board. They should have track records and these should be more important than any paper pedigree. The new generation of veterinarians must be the core.

Canada has lagged behind the European Union concerning farm animal care, until now. Canada's expertise in this field has not been marshaled; rather, it seems to have been very pointedly overlooked. Canada could easily become a leader in this field, at least in this entire Western Hemisphere. If a truly functional Farm Animal Care organization is intended, all those in it should be wished the best and those behind it should be thanked for the decision. Canadian farm animals and their care, can yet be seen internationally as the world's best. A status they deserve.