

Voluntary animal codes of practice encourage complacency

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First printed as a Letter to the Editor in Ontario Farmer

The voluntary Codes of Practice which originated with the original Expert Advisory Committee on Farm Animal Welfare and Behaviour are just that “voluntary”. Nor does the composition of the National Farm Animal Care Council encourage any possibility of changes in the Codes of Practice which might benefit farm animal welfare across the country.

In a recent edition of the *Ontario Farmer*, Don Hartog claims that “animal care standards are advancing rapidly”. To support this claim, Mr. Hartog credits the National Farm Animal Care Council. He claims that this council is “a Canadian organization with a mandate to provide a national co-ordinated approach, promoting responsible farm animal care.”

Further, he claims that “farm organizations are working diligently to develop and implement Codes of Practice for animal care”. If only this claim was correct. The fact of the matter is that the National Farm Animal Care Council does not represent anything other than the existing producers of farm animal products.

For example, in the United States, the use of the veal crates to produce “white veal” is being phased out. The American Veal Association has voted to dispose of the crates entirely within a pre-determined time period. Our enquiries to the Minister of Agriculture of Canada produced a response that the National Farm Animal Care Council is funded to upgrade the Codes of Practice from time to time.

Unfortunately, this is not likely to happen since the only groups or agencies likely to endorse any changes are not members of the National Farm Animal Care Council.

I recently wrote to every member of the National Farm Animal Care Council asking whether they would support a motion by the council to phase out the “white veal crates.” In writing the letter I noticed that seven of the organizations all shared the same address in Ottawa.

Not much chance of an ‘independent’ position there. And, of course (surprise, surprise), I didn’t even receive the courtesy of replies to my letter.

Further enquiries to the Minister of Agriculture of Canada produced the information that the National Farm Animal Care Council was not intended to update the Codes of Practice but rather only to accept the recommendations of the members of the Council which would be affected by any proposed change.

In other words, the National Farm Animal Care Council effectively protects its member organizations and their farming activities against any criticism. Obviously, given these circumstances there never will be a change in the way we care for millions of farm animals if it is left to the National Farm Animal Care Council.

The answer, of course, is to develop 'farm animal care group' which is independent both politically and from industry.

Canadian Farm Animal Care Trust