

MORE THAN GUIDELINES ARE NEEDED FOR ANIMAL WELFARE

Participants of a national egg producer conference in Halifax July 7 were told they need more than a Code of Practice to deal with animal welfare.



Gene Gregory

Gene Gregory, Senior Vice President of United Egg Producers (UEP), said he admired the Code of Practice for the Canadian egg industry as it established very high recommendations for animal care. But he said the next logical step had to be taken and ways found to measure that the recommendations are being adopted on Canadian egg farms.

In fact, that next logical step has already been taken by CEMA as it is developing a rating program to monitor layer welfare and a pilot program is now being tested.

Mr. Gregory outlined the steps taken by UEP in the United States to develop an animal care certified program that goes beyond voluntary guidelines by auditing farms to see if the guidelines are being met. The science-based criteria are developed by a committee made up of leading poultry scientists in the United States.

The program has been supported by the vast majority of U.S. egg purchasers who realize animal welfare must be based on science and not be used as a tool to define specifications for competitive marketing. Seventy-five retail grocery chains now require their egg suppliers to follow the certification program, he said.

Upon questioning from participants, Mr. Gregory agreed egg producers in Canada and the United States should not use animal welfare to compete against each other. It is important that both countries work closely together to ensure a scientific basis for the determining of approved practices.

The United States speaker noted the UEP program provides assurances for egg consumers that animals are cared for properly. Animal rights activists, on the other hand, will never be satisfied, and he warned they have stepped up their activity in the United States. One group, for example, is using legal and regulatory means to draw the industry into frivolous proceedings. Activists have also gone into egg laying facilities and then posted misleading "findings" on the web.

John Wise, former federal agriculture minister, also spoke briefly about animal rights groups. They are well funded and "hire the finest public relations firms in the world."

Animal rights groups are the new external pressure facing animal agriculture, he said. "Don't ignore it; it's out there."