

## ATTITUDES ARE CHANGING

# Pain Management in Farmed Animals

Research shows that some management practices cause pain in animals (e.g., beak-trimming, castration, dehorning, tail-docking, branding). These procedures are generally done without the use of anesthesia or analgesics. Many of these procedures are considered necessary to prevent injuries caused by aggressive displays such as pecking and goring.

Pain or distress caused by generally accepted management practices in animal agriculture is specifically excluded under Canadian animal welfare legislation. This exemption protects producers when conducting necessary management procedures.

Increasingly, these practices are being scrutinized for their impacts on animal well being. Questions are being raised about the necessity of certain practices, and if necessary, are there less painful ways of doing them?

In Norway, pigs can now only be castrated by veterinarians using appropriate analgesia. Pig castration will be banned in Norway beginning in 2009. Germany has revised its Animal Welfare Act, requiring that "painful operations may not be carried out on vertebrates without anesthetic."

**Attitudes are changing.** In Canada, Dr. John Church, Animal Welfare Specialist for Alberta Agriculture, Food and Rural Development says, "to deliberately cause pain to an animal without pain control is now considered unethical."

Dr. David Fraser, a world-renowned animal welfare researcher says, "I think it is in the industry's interests to develop alternatives wherever possible. Examples would be development and testing of immunocastration to replace surgical castration or use of polled genetics to replace dehorning. I think it is in the industry's interests to use pain management when feasible."

*How do we really know when an animal is in pain?  
How severe and prolonged does pain have to be before we must relieve it?*

Some producers and their veterinarians are using pain control. Dr. Duane Landals, Alberta Veterinary Medical Association Registrar says, "In our practice we routinely use pain

relief for dehorning, castration and branding (in horses). The procedures are much easier on both the animal and operator with appropriate pain relief."

Measures for pain control are standard practice during elk velvet antler removal. Dr. Fraser believes the elk industry's *Velvet Antler Removal Certification Program* serves as a useful model to other animal industries. "Producers and vets enter into an agreement whereby producers are trained and authorized to use the correct products in the correct way. This way the industry cannot be accused of withholding available pain management purely for reasons of economics."

With a veterinary-client relationship, producers can access prescription non-narcotic pain relievers according to Dr. Landals. Costs are generally low.



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*Non-invasive method to assess stress and pain*

The display of pain varies between species—observers must be aware of key, and sometimes subtle, signs. Behavioral indicators of pain can be overlooked because we expect animals to express pain in a manner similar to us, when they often do not.

Dr. Paul Flecknell a leading researcher on animal pain at the University of Newcastle, England, says, “If we cannot assess pain, we cannot manage it effectively, and it is likely that a failure to appreciate the severity of pain in individual animals is the single most important factor in the apparent under use of analgesics.”

*Understanding pain and its Relevance to Animals*, a paper by Dr. Church, is available on AFAC’s website (see Resources).

### A LOT HAS CHANGED IN 25 YEARS

"If I was to pick one thing that has made the biggest impact on my work with cattle, it would be the new pain medication that is licensed for use in beef cattle. I can now alleviate a lot of post-surgical pain, for example, in a heifer that has had a cesarean section. Recovery certainly seems a lot easier if pain relief is provided, and ranchers will sometimes remind me to 'give her a shot for pain'."

*Jean Lauder, DVM, Douglas Lake, BC  
Reference: Cattlemen-Jan/04*

**Resources:** AFAC - [afac.ab.ca/reports.htm](http://afac.ab.ca/reports.htm)

Dr. Paul Flecknell - [www.ncl.ac.uk/nnp/staff/profile/p.a.flecknell](http://www.ncl.ac.uk/nnp/staff/profile/p.a.flecknell)

UBC Animal Welfare Program - [agsci.ubc.ca/animalwelfare](http://agsci.ubc.ca/animalwelfare)

University of Saskatchewan Applied Ethology - [www.usask.ca/wcvm/herdmed/applied-ethology/](http://www.usask.ca/wcvm/herdmed/applied-ethology/)

## NEW RESEARCH PROJECT

# Reducing Farm Animal Pain

"Common farming practices cause animals acute and chronic pain. This is not due to a lack of awareness or empathy on the part of the farmers," says University of Saskatchewan large animal expert Joe Stookey. "Using pain control methods on farm animals is not easy and has never been user-friendly, so it is often viewed as unrealistic in terms of cost and labor."

Armed with a recent grant of \$147,915, Stookey leads a team that plans to develop inexpensive, easy-to-use on-farm strategies of animal pain relief.

**"We hope to get a better understanding of pain in animals and make the process of controlling pain as easy and affordable as possible to producers," he says.**

The two-pronged study will examine

the best way to deliver painkillers to piglets before they undergo any procedure and the least painful way to de-horn calves.

Within 24 hours of being born, piglets can experience tooth clipping, castration, tail docking and vaccination.

"It is quite clear from a piglet's reaction that these routine procedures are painful," says Stookey.

Stookey says that although de-horning reduces future risks of injuries and bruising, it also comes at a cost to the animal. Cattle can remember unpleasant handling and may show a fear response when returning to the place where the procedure happened.

"That's why we need to find out whether calves are reacting to pain or to restraint," he says.

Stookey's ultimate hope is that farmers will alter pain-control practices if realistic alternatives are made available to them.

*Reference: Western Hog Journal-Fall/04*



*Dr. Joe Stookey*