

THE PORK INDUSTRY APPROACH

Providing Assurance on Animal Care

The Canadian Pork Council (CPC) has designed an auditable on-farm Animal Care Assessment Tool (ACAT) to operate in parallel with the industry's Canadian Quality Assurance (CQA) on-farm food safety program. Canadian Pork Council Executive Associate Catherine Scovil says, "animal welfare was included in our industry's definition of what constituted a quality product, so it seemed natural to link the Animal Care Assessment Tool to our existing CQA program."

CPC had evidence of a need when it set out to develop its ACAT. "It was a trickle down of comments from food services industries, processors and restaurant industries that they need to have a way of addressing consumer questions pertaining to animal care," says Scovil. The ACAT will be made available to hog producers in early 2005.

The pork industry realized that operating under voluntary codes was not good enough anymore. "We are moving towards auditable approaches. This is not just agriculture, but the world moving in this direction. The sooner we get it done the better off we will be," says Scovil. "We would prefer to avoid the regulatory route if we can keep control over our systems and still meet requirements for trade."

Animal care is an emotional issue—no one likes to be challenged regarding how they care for their animals. Marketing claims that promote a product based on more humane production practices may imply that animals raised under different production systems are somehow less humanely treated. This potential implication has led the pork industry to decide a level

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playing field is more advantageous for the industry as a whole. Scovil says, "We wanted to prevent a continuing spiral of vertical programs that compete with each other."

The public also assumes that animals are being cared for properly on farms. When careless management is exposed it makes people wonder about their assumptions. Scovil says, "We wanted a proactive way to show consumers that we don't accept bad apples in our industry. This message was coming from our producers too. They recognize that these individuals bring the whole industry down. They believe it is better to have national standards that all must abide by to protect the entire industry."

"In the end the question became not 'should we go this route,' but 'why wouldn't we go this route?'" ■

CPC - www.cpc-ccp.com

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