

A Shift in Animal Welfare Complaints

At the June 2004 Expert Committee Meeting on Farm Animal Welfare and Behaviour, Dr. Gus Wruck, Manitoba Veterinary Services Branch, noted during his presentation a rise in animal welfare complaints coming into the Manitoba office. He made an important observation, “this does not indicate an increase in animal abuse, but an increase in interest in how animal are treated.”

Table One shows the number of farm animal welfare complaints received in four provinces over a five-year period. These provinces were selected as they separate livestock complaints from companion animal complaints.

Charts 1 and 2 provide a graphic interpretation of Table One, comparing

TABLE ONE

LIVESTOCK RELATED WELFARE COMPLAINTS OVER A FIVE-YEAR PERIOD

	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003
AB	944	824	996	1033	983
SK	110	161	256	308	278
MB	84	67	95	107	149
ON	Not available	Not available	860	1,148	1,477

changing trends in the four provinces. As Alberta and Ontario have significantly more complaints than Manitoba and Saskatchewan, two charts were needed to effectively illustrate trends.

Interestingly, Alberta is the only province that did not show a notable rise in complaints over the five-year period. Ian MacMillan, Coordinator of Investigative Services for the SK SPCA noted that a change in personnel for 2003 might have had an effect on the number of complaints registered in Saskatchewan for that year.

Enforcement personnel in the four provinces were asked what they felt were the reasons for the general increase in complaints received. Common answers included:

- Less tolerance in the farming community of the ‘bad apples’;
- A connection in people’s minds between animal welfare and food safety;
- Economics – BSE, drought, market crash for alternative livestock species;
- Better inter-agency cooperation (SPCA/industry/government), and;
- People know who to call and trust the SPCA officers more. ■

CHART ONE

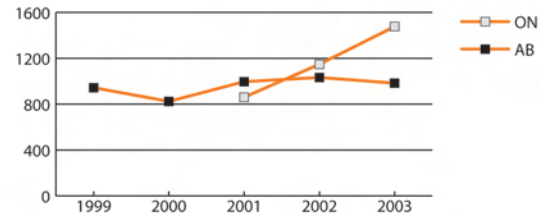
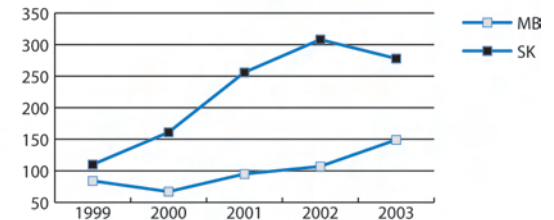


CHART TWO



Humane Handling of Dairy/Beef Cattle

Alberta Milk, Alberta Beef Producers and AFAC have recently released humane handling guidelines, giving producers, veterinarians and animal welfare law enforcement officials “standards for animal assessment to ensure proper humane handling of unfit animals, as required by law and animal welfare standards.”

Aart Okkema, Alberta Milk representative and Chairman of AFAC, says, “All dairy producers in the province have

the manual and barn poster. As well, the SPCA, meat inspectors, some truckers and all federal and provincial meat plants in Alberta have a copy. Producers have always believed in quality care and handling for their animals.”

Conditions that result in carcass condemnation, or are painful and require special handling, are described and illustrated. ‘Producer Actions’ are offered throughout to aid producers in the decision-making process and ensure that timely care is given to animals.

Shelley Morrison, Alberta Beef board representative on AFAC says “We needed this to have consistent standards amongst all parties involved in the handling of cattle. The beef document will be widely distributed this spring.”

These documents are endorsed by Alberta Veterinary Medical Association and Alberta SPCA.

To order a free copy contact AFAC, Alberta Milk or Alberta Beef Producers. ■