

The Use of Pain Management in Livestock

Researchers at the Atlantic Veterinary College in

Charlottetown, PEI are completing a national survey of Canadian veterinarians, to assess the use of painkillers in cattle, pigs, and horses. The goals are to determine:

- **The extent painkillers are used in these species;**
- **Why veterinarians do or do not use painkillers.**

Veterinarians across Canada were randomly selected to participate. Initial results indicate:

- ✓ Most veterinarians do not provide pain relief when castrating calves or piglets.
- ✓ Some veterinarians believe that pain management is not necessary when

using an elastrator, or with procedures involving young animals.

- ✓ Veterinarians almost universally use pain control when dehorning calves and for major surgeries (e.g., caesarian sections).
- ✓ Veterinarians are more likely to treat lame sows with pain relievers than lame cows.
- ✓ Veterinarians feel there is a need for long-acting, affordable painkillers for farm animals.
- ✓ Veterinarians feel that the long, or unknown, withdrawal periods for some painkillers hinder their usage in food production animals.

Lead researcher **Dr. Caroline Hewson** says, “The knowledge of pain and the pain pathways is developing very quickly.

We now know that old assumptions, such as that farm animals are stoical, or that routine surgical procedures don’t hurt much, are not borne out by the physiology.”

However, difficulties exist with the regulation of drugs for use in farm animals, and the unavailability of suitable drugs for some species. “Farmers and veterinarians are being put in a difficult position when it comes to relieving pain in livestock. A solution is badly needed, one which includes the constructive engagement of consumers; a strong commitment by government, drug companies, and the veterinary profession; and continuing education of veterinarians and farmers,” says Dr. Hewson. ■