



For immediate release:

Research partnership drives livestock welfare progress in Alberta

Calgary, Alta., March 31, 2004: A new generation of livestock welfare research is set to anchor a new era of management in Canada's livestock industry.

The Alberta-Canada Livestock Welfare Research Partnership, initiated in 2002 by Alberta Farm Animal Care, Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada (AAFC) and Alberta Agriculture, Food and Rural Development (AAFRD) is part of a broader movement in livestock welfare research to drive animal care progress through innovative technology and knowledge, says Susan Church, Manager of AFAC. Several researchers working under the Partnership updated research progress and unveiled their 2004-2008 strategic plan at the AFAC annual general meeting in Edmonton, March 26.

"Livestock welfare research is increasing in sophistication and is providing a fundamental basis for developing innovative livestock care practices and standards," says Susan Church, AFAC manager. "This is absolutely essential to reaching the level of transparent and verifiable practices we need to meet today's quality assurance expectations and support the sustainability of our industry."

The Partnership was formed to ensure effective technology transfer from research development to producers and the public, says Dr. John Church, AAFRD Livestock Welfare Specialist. It leverages the research networks and expertise of AAFC and AAFRD, while taking advantage of the industry links and resources of AFAC.

"The goals are to help advance the science of animal welfare, ensure livestock production practices are humane and expand the knowledge-base of industry to improve the adoption of livestock welfare standards," says John Church. "A big part of this is developing and promoting practices that maintain or improve economic competitiveness for producers and the livestock industry as a whole – we need solutions that make both practical and economic sense."

Already, many key results have emerged since the partnership began. Examples include modified cages to increase freedom of movement for chickens, non-invasive monitors for early detection of sick cattle and bison dehorning strategies to prevent animal pain.

For the next four years, Partnership research will focus on five key areas, says John Church. These include reducing painful procedures, improving husbandry, promoting livestock health

Continued.....

and improving animal housing and environment. A fifth area will focus on developmental research to discover and apply new methods of assessing welfare of livestock.

“The Partnership brings together a range of expertise and resources to take create a team with a multidisciplinary approach to research,” he says. “It was further recognized that input from the agricultural sector was vital to establish directions for the research group and for communication of research findings to the agricultural community and to the consumer – that’s where AFAC comes in.”

The collective power of the Partnership allows for a broad research scope, says John Church. But the targets of the research team are grounded toward practical solutions that tackle the most pressing industry issues.

Producer and industry support has been key to getting many of these innovations adopted by the industry, he says. “The agricultural sector increasingly recognizes that the welfare of livestock is crucial to successful economics. Practices that improve the welfare of animals have positive economic consequences, and proper husbandry practices provide benefits in terms of reproduction, growth, disease transmission, yield quality and safety of the final product.”

AFAC is an industry-led, industry-managed organization whose goal is to promote responsible animal care and continually search for advancements in animal welfare. More information and background on AFAC is available on the AFAC Web site at www.afac.ab.ca.

-30-

For further information, contact:
Susan Church
AFAC Manager
Phone: (403) 932-8050