



For immediate release:

Alberta livestock care leaders honored with Awards of Distinction

Calgary, Alta., April 08, 2008: Creating a strong future while addressing today's issues was the theme that tied together two recipients of an award presented by Alberta's livestock industry to recognize people making a difference in promoting humane livestock care.

The Awards of Distinction were presented at the Livestock Care Conference, April 4 in Red Deer, hosted by Alberta Farm Animal Care (AFAC). AFAC is a partnership of Alberta's major livestock groups with a mandate to promote responsible, humane animal care within the livestock industry.

The Award of Distinction for Industry Leadership was presented to Lakeland College for its early and continued strong incorporation of humane animal care practices as a core part of the Agricultural Sciences curriculum. The Award of Distinction for Innovation was presented to Red Deer County Agricultural Services Board for its incorporation of protocols and resources for animal care and handling into its emergency preparedness plans.

"This year's award recipients are excellent examples of organizations and people in our industry who have worked hard to advance the well being of livestock in Alberta," says Susan Church, Manager of Alberta Farm Animal Care (AFAC). "Lakeland College has accomplished this by helping to train the next generation of industry leaders. Red Deer County has accomplished this through an innovative, practical approach to one of today's key issues, which is emergency preparedness. Both are strong ambassadors for the Alberta livestock industry."

Lakeland College incorporates practical, hands-on, low stress livestock handling techniques into its Agricultural Sciences curriculum. The college introduced its first animal handling course in 1996. Later, welfare and ethics were added to what today is now called the Animal Handling, Welfare and Ethics course.

The course includes an introduction to safe handling and restraint of various types of large animals in clinical and field settings. Handler safety, the assessment of humane treatment and housing of the animal is discussed in a lab setting and in lectures. Students are then assigned a 600-800 lb heifer or intact bull calf and are required to work with herds and flocks of beef and dairy cattle, sheep and swine. In seven weeks, they are expected to put the low stress handling techniques learned in class into practice.

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“Today’s livestock industry is challenged to secure employees that are experienced in livestock handling,” says Steve Pylot, the current instructor of the program. “Our curriculum helps to ensure that students can develop core skills and respect for the low stress handling expectations of the livestock industry.”

The animal care measures and resources taken on by Red Deer County Agricultural Services Board include a well-provisioned livestock emergency response trailer, a first for Alberta. The trailer, which was purchased and outfitted through community fundraising and sponsorship, includes tools and materials to assist emergency response workers in managing crisis situations involving livestock, particularly on Alberta’s highways. An estimated six million head of livestock travel through the county every year.

“The emergency trailer is something that is needed and everyone in the county will benefit,” says Art Preachuk, the Agricultural Manager for Red Deer County. “Accidents happen and that includes trucks transporting livestock. When that happens, we want the right tools to help those livestock and keep the people who are working on those animals safe.”

The Red Deer County Council, Red Deer County Protective Services (Fire Department) and the Agricultural Services Board have all strongly supported the project. Together, they developed a 10 point Emergency Response Plan for Livestock and conducted related training of the county’s emergency response staff and volunteers. This plan and training, combined with the trailer, makes the County one of the best prepared in North America to respond to livestock transport accidents.

“This effort is something I strongly believe in,” says Bob Bolton, who runs a family based cattle operation in the Red Deer County area. Bolton was one of the first community members to come forward to contribute to the initiative. “We are a mobile society and our livestock are also more mobile than ever. Today, cattle are on trucks at least three and up to six times in their lifetime.”

The Livestock Care Conference drew over 230 livestock industry participants. More information is available at www.afac.ab.ca.

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