

## BACKGROUND

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**Farmers care about animal welfare.** Farmers firmly believe that animals must be treated properly, and they work hard to care for their livestock appropriately. It is in the interest of all stakeholders in the agri-food industry, and in the public interest, to ensure that animals are treated as carefully and respectfully as possible.

**Raising animals responsibly.** Consumers want to be sure that cruelty-free practices are used in the raising, transportation, and slaughter of animals; they also want access to food that is safe and responsibly produced.

**Shocking images not reflective of reality.** From time to time, certain disturbing images circulate in social media, and in the traditional media, depicting animals raised in deplorable conditions (poor hygiene, stressful handling, crowding, etc.). These images, which often come from pressure groups, do not reflect the reality of livestock farming in Quebec.

**A regulatory framework.** Quebec livestock farmers are required to follow the *Animal Health Protection Act*, which specifies the basic conditions and care that animals must receive for their safety and well-being. Farmers must also comply with federal legislation, which establishes standards on the transportation of animals.

**Codes of practice.** The majority of national livestock farmers' associations (pork, poultry, beef, dairy, and egg producers) have developed codes of practice in collaboration with the National Farm Animal Care Council (NFACC). These codes govern the conditions in which the animals are raised and are based on the latest scientific information regarding the best care for animals. It is important to note that the NFACC brings many concerned stakeholders to the same table, including livestock farmers' associations, veterinarians, humane societies, and consumers. Canadian codes of practice on animal welfare stack up favourably against those of other countries.

**A work in progress.** Over the years, with the implementation of codes of practice and the development of scientific knowledge, a number of producers' sectors have changed how they raise livestock. For example, the Fédération des producteurs d'œufs du Québec adopted a resolution in 2012 to include more space for laying hens (double the area per bird) with perches, nest boxes, and isolators in all newly built laying barns and in changes to existing ones. Also, the Quebec milk-fed veal producers decided to revise their practices by implementing group housing on all Quebec farms by 2018.

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## CHALLENGES AND ISSUES

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**Dispelling misinformation.** Animal welfare and misinformation about it are among the UPA's concerns. To rectify the situation, we need to set the record straight on the practices used on farms and raise public awareness about this societal issue. The public does not currently have all the information needed for a full understanding of livestock farming in context. There are also large differences among the scientific knowledge on the subject, the farming practices actually used, and the information that filters through to consumers.

**Promoting codes of practice.** The UPA supports codes of practice that have been established with input from the whole industry and encourages all producers to abide by them. The UPA feels strongly that these codes must be developed on the basis of evolving scientific knowledge. The UPA also believes that researchers must remain keenly aware of the production sector and stay connected with the reality of the situation on the farm.

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**Continued partnerships.** The UPA and its livestock farmers' associations must continue their collaborations with the various stakeholders interested in animal welfare, such as the working group on Quebec's animal health and welfare strategy and those involved in NFACC's national forum. The UPA feels that discussions on animal husbandry methods that come out of these gatherings will bring about real progress in the field of livestock care while ensuring that animal husbandry remains profitable in a context of growing market demand.

**New standards.** The UPA bans all form of animal abuse. Beyond cruelty, farmers are particularly concerned with the comfort and well-being of their animals. Significant investments are however required to update livestock buildings and producers needs to be supported. Smaller farms will face bigger difficulties to achieve those updates and find return of investment. It also raises some other issues and questions. Moreover, the competitiveness context of the sector will require new animal welfare standards that will also apply to imported products, when applicable.