

Updated Dairy Code of Practice

Dr. Rachel Poppe

The updated Dairy Code of Practice comes into effect April 1, 2024 and it is important to understand the key points. The animal care section of ProAction requires that all farms follow the practices outlined in the most current code of practice, so you will see some of the new policies being addressed within the ProAction program in the near future. Many of you are already familiar with the code of practice and know that it addresses all aspects of animal care. The key areas include; facilities and housing, feed and water, husbandry practices (such as dehorning), cattle health, preparation for transportation, and euthanasia. It should also be noted that under the code of practice all personnel on farm must be properly trained and made aware of code requirements. Consider printing a copy of the code to keep in the office where it is accessible to all employees. A copy can be found on the Dairy Farmers of Canada website.

Facilities and Housing

For calves – Tethering is allowed in outdoor hutch systems only; calves housed indoors cannot be tethered. All calves must also be able to have physical contact with other calves (previous code was only visual contact). Producers should also make a plan to move towards pair or group housing calves that are indoors. As of April 2031, healthy calves must be housed in pairs or groups by 4 weeks of age for indoor housing. Calves housed outdoors in hutches can remain singularly housed until weaning providing they have physical contact with other calves.

For cows – as of April 2027 cows cannot be tethered continuously during their production cycle (calving to calving); this means that at some point in their production cycle cows need to be loose housed. This can be accomplished by daily turnout or loose housing during the dry period.

Effective April 2029 cows must calve in loose housing (calving in a tie stall no longer permitted).

Effective April 2024, stanchions are no longer permitted, and new buildings need to include cow access to daily freedom of movement. This means cows cannot be tied for a full 24 hour period.

Free-stall stocking density allowances are also changing, currently farms cannot exceed 1.2 cows/stall, as of 2027 this goes down to 1.1 cows/stall and as of 2031 it is 1.0

cows/stall. For pack barns stocking density must not exceed 100ft²/cow of bedded pack space (this does not include the scrape ally).

Nutrition and Feeding Management

Not much new in this area, make sure all animals have access to clean water and are fed a ration that supports nutritional needs. Body Condition Score is also important to be aware of, if cows have a BCS of 2 or lower corrective action needs to be taken.

For calves it should be noted that there are specific milk feeding guidelines to follow (in addition to a minimum of 4L of colostrum within 12 hours). For the first week of life calves need to be fed a minimum of 15% bodyweight in milk/milk replacer (6L for Holsteins) after that a minimum of 20%BW (8L for Holsteins). Calves must be at least 8 weeks old at weaning and be weaned gradually over a minimum of 5 days.

Husbandry Practices

Handling down cows has been specifically added to this section in the new code. Cows cannot be moved by hoisting, dragging, or lifting without adequate support. This means that hip lifters can only be used for a short period of time to assist the animal in standing. Moving cows onto a board or stone boat to then drag or in a tractor bucket would be considered acceptable.

Dehorning must be done by 2 months of age and castration of bull calves must be done as soon as possible. In addition, local freezing and a painkiller must be used.

Cattle Health

You should be aware that the new code requires all dairy producers to keep a minimum of 3 years' worth of disease treatment and event records. All personnel on the farm should be able to identify sick, injured, or lame animals and prompt treatment should occur.

In regards to calves, mortality should not exceed 10%. If this does occur corrective action(s) must be implemented with the help of your veterinarian.

The hoof trimming section of the code is expanded to include pain management to any cows that have received an invasive trim. It also states that all infectious hoof lesions must be treated to control infection, and therapeutic trimming should relieve pain and pressure in order to promote healing.

Transportation & Euthanasia

These sections have also been expanded to include more details in the full version of the code, but there are not any significant changes in these areas. The key aspects are that all

animals are evaluated as fit prior to transport and if compromised special provisions are made to send them direct to slaughter. The same goes for calves, and if under 8 days of age they are still allowed to be transported if special provisions are made and they are sent directly to their final destination and not through a sales barn.

When euthanizing it is important to use an acceptable method that is quick and causes minimal pain. Blunt force trauma is NOT considered acceptable. Captive bolt followed by a secondary method or gunshot with an appropriate firearm are both considered acceptable methods. Please consult your veterinarian for proper training and assessment of euthanized cattle.

Final Thoughts

The new code of practice is a nationally agreed upon standard within the dairy industry. It was developed by a committee of dairy farmers, processors, veterinarians, animal welfare experts, and government representatives. The goal is to guide farmers and help the dairy industry grow. If you have any questions reach out to your veterinarian or farm advisors to assist you in ensuring that your farm is on track with the new codes requirements and recommendations.