

One Welfare Interim Report

November 2017



NFAHW 
COUNCIL

This document was prepared by the National Farmed Animal Health and Welfare Council. The Council was formed in 2010 to advise governments and all other stakeholders in animal agriculture on matters of the health and welfare of farmed animals in Canada. The Council is funded jointly by non-government organizations with an interest in animal agriculture and federal, provincial and territorial governments. Council members are designated by their constituency because of broad expertise in animal health and welfare, public health and an interest in approaching topics and developing advice in the context of One Health.

The National Farmed Animal Health and Welfare Council would like thank the working group for their time and commitment to improving Canada's farmed animal health and welfare system.

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Background

The purpose of this interim report is to raise awareness of the issue of One Welfare in the agriculture community and to propose some initial steps to address the issue.

As a concept “One Welfare” is a call to recognize the many social interconnections between human welfare, animal welfare and the integrity of the environment. In practice, it is also a call for a coordinated program of action:

- to improve animal welfare in order to improve human welfare (and *vice versa*),
- to co-ordinate actions between animal protection and other services, and
- to protect the environment as a fundamental step for both human and animal welfare.

The One Welfare concept stems from the One Health framework and is focused on the health, well-being, and the mental health of the farming community, their livestock and the associated professions that work with them. Producers, farm staff, service providers and veterinary personnel in the agriculture community were considered in this review.

While One Welfare can apply to a wide range of situations including the impacts of emergencies such as natural disasters and animal depopulation on the farm, this study focused on the mental health of producers in non-exceptional operating conditions.

In September 2016, the NFAHW Council was the primary sponsor for the International One Welfare Conference that was held in Winnipeg, MB. This conference brought together experts from Canada, the USA, Australia and Europe to discuss many of the components of One Welfare. One of the highlighted topics was dealing with the well-being of farmers and developing resources to enhance the resilience to maintain that well-being.

The Council identified a need for increased awareness and advocacy for the improvement of the well-being and mental health resources for producers, farm staff, service providers and veterinary personnel within the agricultural industry. The Council therefore tasked the working group to investigate the concept of One Welfare as it pertains to the aspect of mental health promotion and prevention for this population. The concept of One Welfare also includes the interaction of animal abuse and mental health, but in the initial work, this has not been addressed.

Canada’s Livestock Market Interruption Strategy (LMIS) is also relevant to One Welfare. The LMIS is designed to facilitate the normalization of trade and animal production in the event of a catastrophic event. However, there could be mass depopulation situations which would have profound effects on the well-being of those workers and producers involved. These effects can also be encountered in depopulation situations of lesser extent and during the

control of diseases outbreaks. Part of the approach of One Welfare is the development of resources and tools for resilience building for all impacted stakeholders in order to be better prepared to face such difficult events and remain strong. These tools are broadly identified through educational actions.

The recently accepted Plant and Animal Health Strategy may also address the potential impact of mental health on animal health when addressing “Enabling Desired Behaviors” in section 5.4 although this is more broadly focused on systemic behaviours. However, individual actions outside best practices due to mental illness can influence the system.

In order to effect functional change, it is important to address behaviors and perceptions. It is also well known that mental illness can impact the behavior of individuals and those around them. Normalizing the stigma of mental health and building appropriate supportive infrastructure will be important in enabling desired behaviors. This is already addressed within the general public but there also needs to be specific tools that can be used in different populations and communities.

The health and well-being of rural populations around the world is frequently at a disadvantage due to the natural geography, the health resources available, and the barriers for access to care. In Canada, this is also true. Much of the rural population is also associated with the agricultural industry. It has been clearly shown in research by Rosmannⁱ into the mental well-being of farmers that there are unique factors that contribute to the health of this population.

A preliminary environmental scan has identified a few long standing resources across Canada and also a history of multiple failed attempts to establish sustainable resources, specifically for the farming community and the associated professions. To address the future well-being and health of agricultural producers, farm staff, service providers and veterinary personnel, it is important to advocate for increased awareness to these issues and to look for sustainable methods to put resources in place.

The Council has identified actions that are required to move this issue forward which are included in this interim report. These identified actions are based on a preliminary environmental scan of the resources in Canada, interviews with current researchers and program experts, and considers the scope of the issue. The core framework focuses on leadership, education and awareness, utilizing resources that have already been identified and established, and identifying the methods that will improve sustainability for future programs.

Review of Current Resources

The following resources are among the resources studied in the review of resources in Canada:

- **Manitoba Farm, Rural and Northern Support Services (MFRNSS):**

This telephone and on-line counselling service has been active since 2000 and predominantly serves Manitoba. It is open to calls from agricultural producers in other provinces, however the toll-free line currently only serves Manitoba. Hours of operation are Monday to Friday 10 AM to 9 PM.

All MFRNSS counsellors have professional counselling as well as farming backgrounds. Research has shown that farmers have higher stress levels, and lower help-seeking behaviours than the general population. When they do seek help however, it is of the utmost importance to them that the person they are dealing with is knowledgeable about agricultureⁱⁱ.

The addition of a new online Crisis Chat program expands on the MFRNSS's capacity to provide support to hard-to-reach populations such as farmers. The MFRNSS website (www.supportline.ca) and free App (www.calminthestormapp.com) provides information and self-help tools to help manage stress on the farm. The MFRNSS also provides outreach and education to the agricultural and general public on a range of topics related to farm stress management, and building resiliency.

The Manitoba Farm, Rural and Northern Support Services is a program of Klinik Community Health (www.klinik.mb.ca), and receives annual funding from the provincial government's Department of Health. With additional third party funding the MFRNSS is poised to expand its reach and hours of operation to become a National Farm Stress Line.

- **Union des Producteurs Agricoles du Québec (UPA) – Syndicate Project**

UPA represents roughly 42 000 Quebec farmers as well as all forestry producers in the province, regrouped within 12 regional federations. The project intends to train 600 agriculturally based people using the Quebec Association for Suicide Prevention program, which has been adapted specifically for farmers. A support line has also been established. The Project Manager, Pierre-Nicolas Girard is invited to make a presentation about this project at Forum 2017.

- **Canadian Agricultural Safety Association**

The Canadian Agricultural Safety Association is a national, non-profit organization dedicated to improving the health and safety of farmers, their families and agricultural workers. CASA works collaboratively with agriculture safety and health specialists and producers in all provinces and territories to promote health and safety on Canadian farms and ranches. Canadian Agricultural Injury Reporting (CAIR) is an integrated national injury surveillance project of the Canadian Agricultural Safety Association that guides and informs agricultural injury prevention activities.

- **Canadian Veterinary Medical Association – Veterinary Wellness Committee**

The CVMA through its Veterinary Wellness Committee has developed multiple resources and support services for veterinarians and veterinary students. The colleges and provincial associations also have developed more locally available resources and services. These are veterinarian focused and are aimed at addressing stress, financial stresses, addictions, suicide, physical health, etc. With education programs available with the associations and some colleges, this is aimed to develop resilience in this profession for now and the future.

- **Dr. Andria Jones-Bitton, University of Guelph**

Dr. Andria Jones-Bitton, with the Ontario Veterinary College Advancing Wellness and Resilience via Research and Education (AWAR2E) Group, is advancing the research and scientific knowledge around mental health in veterinarians, veterinary students, and agricultural producers in Canada. Her research is focused on an extensive literature search, widespread qualitative research from stakeholder interviews, and evaluation of best practices for training and education of producers to improve mental health resilience, and development of mental health resource models. Currently, a literature search has been done and has identified over 500 articles and documents, which are to be evaluated. Stakeholder interviews are being conducted over the balance of 2017 to understand the lived experience of mental health and well-being within the agricultural industry participants. Stakeholder meetings are further identifying knowledge and perceived needs; the first was held in September 2017. All this knowledge translation will be collated in a document planned for release in December 2019 that would highlight appropriate agricultural education and courses that should be used on a wider basis. This will be groundbreaking research for Canada and will help highlight the path forward for the agricultural industry.

Identified Actions

Bearing in mind that there are important research results pending, the Council has identified actions that are necessary to further develop this important issue in the agricultural community.

1. The development of a cross-jurisdictional and multi-stakeholder **leadership** group to enhance communications, education, and support services for the enhancement of the personal well-being within the producer, farm staff, service providers and veterinary personnel working in agriculture. The leadership will require participation from producer and commodity groups, from academia, and from regional and national government in health and agriculture.
2. Recognizing the importance of enhancing the general well-being and mental health of the public in general, that the well-being of producers, farm staff, service providers and veterinary personnel working in agriculture is specifically addressed through communication and **educational** programs

3. The NFAHWC recommends support of **research** and knowledge translation that is focused more specifically for agricultural producers, farm staff, service providers and veterinary personnel compared to typical public educational materials for well-being and mental health resilience.
4. Recognizing the complexities and **stigma** of addressing the mental health of producers and veterinary personnel, fostering dialogue across all stakeholders in the agricultural industry to understand means of normalizing the importance of personal well-being.

ⁱ Rosmann, M.R. (2010). The Agrarian Imperative. *Journal of Agromedicine*, 15(2), 71-75

ⁱⁱ Sturgeon, R. et al. Qualitative Analysis of Suicide Ideation among Manitoban Farmers, *CJC* 2010, 44(2), 191–207