

The Producers' Perspective: Constraints to Farm Animal Welfare Policy Implementation in Alberta

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Public trust in agriculture has become an important driver in policy developments as consumers seek to better understand how their food is produced and seek assurances of ethical and environmentally sustainable food production. Survey data collected by the Canada West Foundation suggests that Canadians hold exceptional support for and trust in farming, especially in comparison to other resource industries; however, the primary reason for distrusting the industry stems from farm animal welfare issues. In Alberta, the Animal Protection Act and the Compromised Animal Policy serve as examples of policies that are driven through legislation, law, and regulation. Additionally, there are numerous multi-stakeholder and industry-led policies, such as the Code of Practice for the Care and Handling of Beef Cattle and the Canadian Roundtable for Sustainable Beef initiatives. This study is based on 20 semi-structured interviews with beef producers in Alberta. Preliminary findings indicate a willingness among beef producers to embrace new animal welfare policies from multi-stakeholder organizations. However, there are at least four key constraints expressed by beef producers regarding the on-farm implementation of these policies: (1) scale of industry; (2) financial constraints; (3) transferring technology back to the farm; (4) time constraints; and finally (5) the complexity of farm animal welfare issues. Understanding producer perspectives and constraints offers unique insights on the development and implementation of farm animal welfare policies.