

# Beef Production and Animal Care

When animals are used for human benefit, they should be treated humanely. This is the guiding principle of animal care.

## Are Beef Cattle Treated Humanely?

Humane treatment is consistent with beef production. Contented, healthy cattle are more productive. Well cared for animals grow faster and produce higher quality beef. Most farmers and ranchers raise cattle because they enjoy working with animals and respect the importance of treating them responsibly.

Canada's beef producers have joined with governments, veterinarians, and humane societies to establish a national code of practice for the handling of cattle. Producer education and training programs are in place to help ensure farmers and ranchers have up to date information on animal care.

## How Are Beef Cattle Raised?

Beef production begins with cow-calf operations that raise calves for the industry. Mating takes place in early summer with peak calving taking place the following spring after the end of harsh weather. On most farms, the entire cow-calf process takes place exclusively outside on open pasture where the cattle graze and calves nurse until they reach a weight of approximately 500 to 600 pounds.

After weaning, calves are raised on hay-based diets until their weight increases to about 900 pounds. During this phase, beef producers take care to provide feeding and bedding areas that are sheltered from the elements and keep the animals comfortable and protected.

The only intensive part of conventional beef production takes place at the feedlot where cattle are brought to a finished weight of 1300 to 1450 pounds. Beef production on a feedlot begins with a diet made up of hay and forages and progressively moves to about 90 per cent grain. This ensures the marbling and quality that Canadians expect in their beef. Cattle will typically spend 60 to 120 days on a feedlot before they are sold to processors. Beef feedlots can be very large, but they are subject to the same animal welfare principles. Cattle have access to ample food and water, sunshine and fresh air, and space to move about.

## What about Slaughter?

Cattle are rendered unconscious as the first step in the slaughter process. Federal inspectors are instructed to immediately halt the stunning and slaughter operations if they observe inhumane treatment.

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## Regulations

Animal protection in Canada is provided for by several legal jurisdictions, including the Criminal Code of Canada. Provinces also legislate in this area. Municipalities may also have animal cruelty bylaws and employ animal control officers. Livestock producers are subject to the same laws preventing cruelty to animals.

## The Role of Beef Producers

Beef producers have both an ethical as well as an economic interest in the humane treatment of their animals. Animal care is an integral part of beef production in Canada from birth through to market. All participants in beef production play an active role in monitoring the well-being and condition of the animals.