

## Fred Pearce Memorial Lecture

### Changes in Society's Attitude Toward Animal Welfare/Animal Well-being: "What does this mean to agricultural producers, including horse owners?"

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#### *Introduction*

Frederick William Pearce was born in 1917 and died in August 1993 at the age of 76 years. He spent his life on the 320-acre Pearce family farm—a mixed farming operation with cattle, grain crops and horses--near Huxley, Alberta.

No one at the Alberta SPCA had the privilege of meeting Mr. Pearce. We came to know him posthumously when we were advised that the proceeds of his estate had been entrusted to the Alberta SPCA, with the proviso that the proceeds would be used to carry on his deep and caring concern for the welfare of horses. At the request of Mr. Pearce's family, in July 1994 I accompanied Alberta SPCA Executive Director Neil McDonald to the Pearce family farm to receive the proceeds of the estate, in front of the barn where Fred Pearce's horses had been sheltered, and on the land where he had shared his life with them.

After much thoughtful consideration, it was agreed that we could best fulfill Mr. Pearce's wishes, the mission of the Alberta SPCA, and most directly communicate a message of responsible animal ownership with people in the horse industry by annually sponsoring a speaker who could address topics and issues of direct relevance to the humane and ethical treatment and use of horses. And so the Fred Pearce Memorial Lecture series was born.

This year, it is my honour and privilege to have been invited to present the 10<sup>th</sup> message in this series sponsored by the Alberta SPCA. The organizing committee invited me to digress slightly (I am neither a scientist nor a horse owner) and to draw on my years of active participation in promoting animal welfare at the local SPCA level, provincially with the Alberta SPCA, and nationally with the Canadian Federation of Humane Societies (CFHS) to look at "Changes in society's attitude toward animal welfare/animal well-being: what does this mean to agricultural producers, including horse owners?"



I will give you an overview of who the SPCA is, particularly the Alberta SPCA, as well as the Canadian Federation of Humane Societies. Then I will discuss briefly humans' moral duty to animals and look at the paradigm shift that is occurring in humans' attitude toward how animals are treated and used. Society's changing attitude toward the treatment and use of animals will change agricultural practices in the future; we will look at some of the steps already being taken at the corporate level to address society's evolving concerns and expectations; and proactive recommendations that have been made for Canadian producers.

***The SPCA: what is it?***

*Societies for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (SPCAs) have been with us for many years. Generally, they were formed by true humanitarians: people whose intent was to make the world a better place for both animals and people. More recently, emphasis on social sciences has brought into being a range of other organizations devoted entirely to promoting and protecting the well-being of people. With the issues relative to humans' welfare thus being addressed, SPCAs have focused their attention and efforts on addressing issues specifically related to the welfare of animals.*

*The Alberta SPCA is a non-profit, provincially incorporated charitable organization. Since enactment in 1967 of Alberta's precedent-setting Animal Protection Act, the provincial government has entrusted enforcement of its legislation, in municipalities not served by a local SPCA, to Alberta SPCA Special Constables appointed by the Solicitor General of the province.*

*The mission of the Alberta SPCA is, "to have every animal in Alberta humanely treated." It is an ambitious goal, but a goal that is shared by and has the support of thousands of caring Albertans. The Alberta SPCA is a traditional, mainstream animal welfare society.*

*The program has evolved through the years to make Alberta a leader in the delivery of animal protection and welfare services. In Alberta, we have a program that, as far as we know, is unique at least in North America: The Alberta Livestock Protection System (ALPS).*

The Alberta SPCA is only one of more than 100 SPCAs (or humane societies as some prefer to call themselves), their branches and affiliates, who have joined to form the Canadian Federation of Humane Societies. The Federation's purpose is to promote compassion and humane treatment of animals by "*helping people to help animals*". Each of the Federation's member societies, as well as the Federation, is a separate organization. Each one is autonomous and sets priorities according to the needs of the animals within its jurisdiction.

## *Moral duty*

Theories about the origin and processes of evolution of our world and its inhabitants. Whatever the processes, animals have always been an integral part of the system. Interdependence of species, human and nonhuman, is vital to the well-being, indeed, to the survival, of all. The humans in this symbiotic relationship have evolved with the ability to manipulate the system; also to be compassionate. To be compassionate is to have sympathy for the feelings and needs of others. It is the essential element of humaneness (or “*humanness*”): having feelings proper to humans.

The nature of animals’ feelings is being studied by ethologists and animal behaviorists, of whom Canada has some of the best known and most respected in the world. It is unlikely that animals’ feelings are the same as humans’, but undeniably, each animal is the subject of a life with interests unique to its nature, or *telos*, and intrinsically valuable for its role in the interconnectedness of all life. People who live with and work with livestock animals do not need science to prove to them that animals have feelings. They know intuitively that horses and other animals can reason, can and do communicate with each other and their caregivers, and can suffer.

Then surely it follows that livestock are, indeed, objects of moral concern to which humans have a moral obligation to respect their feelings; to prevent, if possible, or at least to minimize, pain, suffering and distress; to defend them against cruelty and pain; and to treat them kindly and humanely in keeping with individual natures.

Well-known scientist and animal behaviorist Dr. Andrew Fraser, who has spend decades living with horses and studying their nature, explained that, “*sentience in its full meaning is comprehensive responsiveness, which is more than reflexes to stimuli, more psychological than physical and more emotional than mechanical . . . Sentience in an animal used in domestication raises questions about society’s obligation from such use.*”

## **A paradigm shift**

Since first domesticated, livestock, including horses, have lived in varying degrees and conditions of confinement and have been subjected to a variety of traditional treatments and uses. A modern paradigm shift is challenging the broad assumption that current practices born of traditional utilitarian animal husbandry are fair.



In 1964, Englishwoman Ruth Harrison published her book titled *Animal Machines*. In it she argued that the welfare of farm animals is jeopardized not just by individuals who abuse their animals, but by systems of intensive livestock production based on the philosophy of maximum production and maximum profit. The book was very influential and prompted formation of the British parliamentary Brambell Committee. After reviewing the welfare of farm animals in intensive husbandry systems, the committee presented a report proposing that all farm animals should, at least, be able to stand up, lie down, turn around, groom themselves and stretch their limbs. These minimal standards came to be known as the *Five Freedoms*.

There is now wide recognition of the Five Freedoms. Regrettably, in current commercial transport of livestock and horses, it has to be acknowledged that all five freedoms are seldom (if ever) met.

*Animal welfare/animal rights: is there a difference?*

*In recent years, there has been a trend toward popularization of the concept of animal rights. Animal rights is not a new concept. It is an ideal that has been espoused by a variety of people for hundreds of years. Elemental to that concept is the protection of animals, which all caring people agree with. Beyond that element of oneness, there are fundamental philosophical differences that distinguish animal rightists, per se, from animal welfarists. Those differences flow from the concept of animals' right to life, which precludes humans' privilege to kill animals for food or to use them in any way that interferes with their natural existence. Today's goal-oriented animal rightists are confronting society, demanding that their ideal be realized now. Still entrenched in our system of values (perhaps left over from our hunter/gatherer origins) is the legitimacy and social acceptance of killing animals for food, of rearing them for a source of food products, and of using them for a variety of other human purposes.*

*Federal and provincial legislation for the protection of animals is clear evidence that society accepts the proposition that animals, although considered property by law, are objects of moral concern of sufficient importance to be entitled to at least limited protection in law. This implies, although not explicitly stated, that there are, in fact, rights that are not those of the owner, but of the animal itself, and which are to be protected.*

*How do we define fair practice in the care of horses and livestock?*

Dr. Fraser recalls that one of his professors stated: “*To appreciate a horse's state you must put yourself in its shoes.*” And following his decades of studying the nature of horses, Dr. Fraser believes that “*. . . an appreciation of equine well-being requires an element of anthropomorphism (i.e., to identify the horse in human terms or concepts.)*”. The study of animal behaviour coupled with advancing veterinary science offers guidelines to producers to improve animal well-being through management practices more appropriate to the individual animal.

The *Recommended Code of Practice for the Care and Handling of Farm Animals: Horses* was completed in 1998. That code is supplemented by the *Recommended Code of Practice for the Care and Handling of Horses In PMU Operations* (pregnant mare urine) which was first published in 1990 and most recently amended in 1996. The Preface to the PMU code states concisely and explicitly:

*“Responsibility for the humane treatment and proper care of farm and domestic animals lies with those who have assumed stewardship of these animals. As the primary beneficiaries, we have this moral obligation.*

*“Our progressive society continues to express an evolving concern about animal welfare. This concern, linked to improvements in human standards of living and a more informed public, necessitates that our industry respond proactively to the issue.*

*“For most, our caring nature, and the recognition that proper animal care leads to enhanced productivity is all that is required to ensure that the needs of our livestock are looked after.”*

Some producer organizations had developed Quality Assurance (QA) programs and are now beginning to extend these programs to include animal welfare.

### *Beyond Canada*

During the past couple of years, with little leadership from government representatives or producers but, in response to pressure from animal rights groups, changing public attitudes toward the welfare of animals, particularly management practices for farm animals, and changing animal welfare standards coupled with legislative changes in Britain and Europe, United States (US) restaurants and retail food companies began creating standards of their own--standards of animal care that producers must meet in order for their products to be offered for sale to the public. These standards are mandatory.

At the same time, Europe has moved toward legislated standards with elaborate inspection and enforcement procedures.

### **Looking to the future**

The setting of mandatory standards and systems to audit and verify compliance in the US will undoubtedly impact animal production and animal welfare guidelines in Canada. It is unlikely US-owned companies in Canada will accept Canada's voluntary codes of practice to verify standards of animal welfare in the supply chain. Similarly, it is likely European markets will be looking to deal only with producers whose practices are closely monitored by inspection and controlled by either legislated or otherwise verifiable standards.

In this part of the country we do not eat our horses, but certainly many thousands of horses are transported to slaughter in Alberta to supply a foreign food market. Both the transport and slaughter for meat are contentious issues. In the US, *The American Horse Slaughter Prevention Act* has been introduced in the House of Representatives. It is expected that an identical piece of legislation will be introduced to the US Senate. If passed, the legislation would ban the trade of live horses and horse meat for human consumption. In addition, the legislation would stop the export of horses from the US to Canada and Mexico for the purpose of slaughter.

The “horse industry” encompasses a broad range of diverse activities. I believe it goes without saying that the challenge to traditional practices of animal management and use will reach all aspects of the industry from transport, to racing, to the PMU industry, to the individual who owns and rides a horse for pleasure, to all the other activities involving horses. With increasing understanding of horses’ nature and sensibility, there is increasing ethical responsibility to the animals. The horse may be most deserving of modern understanding and respect because of its great history with humans and humans’ indebtedness to it for its labour. As Dr. Fraser has pointed out, “*Humans’ obligation to horses is beyond question. Horses do have a right: the right to humane care.*” I would add: humane care born of respect for their *telos*, or individual natures.



## Conclusion

There is a line between idealism and practicality. It is there you find representatives of responsible animal welfare organizations seeking ways to best meet the needs of animals now by:

- communicating and working with animal owners and users to understand current practices;
- promoting research directed to determining best management practices in order to mitigate suffering wherever animals are used; and
- working to affect the actions and values of society as a whole to promote responsible animal ownership and use to protect the quality of life for animals for all time.

I think everyone is prepared to admit that Canada's codes of practice are by no means complete and certainly not perfect. They are proof, however, that producers and animal welfarists can work together toward a common goal and that both animals and producers are benefiting.

My personal approach to animal welfare issues is aimed at creating positive working relationships with people in animal-related industries. This approach flows from what I believe is our **80:20 opportunity**. Animal welfarists and agriculturists share a vital *raison d'être*. Our shared reason for being is animals. For agriculturists, it is specifically livestock; for animal welfarists, it is all animals, including livestock. I believe that considered positively, a close look at the various animal welfare issues reveals great opportunities to work together on behalf of animals because we agree on 80% of the issues.

In closing, I quote Dr. John Webster who pointed out that, "*So far as the animals are concerned it matters not what we think or feel but what we do.*" His "*cool (i.e. rational and unemotional)*" approach to "*right action (is) based on academic principles of research, education and legislation—research to improve our understanding of what is right, education to bring human perceptions of what is right closer to the way that animals feel about it themselves, and legislation to enforce the right when it conflicts with self-interest, market forces or short-termism . . . there can be no doubt that the welfare of animals depends, too, on the strength of our emotions, particularly the emotions of compassion and anger.*"

Support for science-based farm animal welfare codes of practice to serve as the basis for measurable standards that will be part of a complete, auditable verification program, balanced education programs, strong legislation for the protection of animals that promotes responsible animal ownership and use, and promotion of welfare-related research afford 80% of common ground on which to cooperate and work together in a positive, effective relationship based on mutual trust.

Canada's agricultural industry must be more than economically competitive. It must also be able to be held up as an example of humane stewardship on behalf of the animals it uses. A concerned public and enlightened consumers are insisting on nothing less. For the animals, let's use (not lose) the 80:20 opportunity.

No group or individual has a monopoly on wisdom or virtue. We need each other. The animals need all of us working together on their behalf toward that ultimate goal: a world in which animals are treated with the respect due to fellow creatures with whom we share the earth.

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