

Recommended code of practice for the care and handling of farm animals

Farmed deer

THE CODES OF PRACTICE:

The Codes of Practice are nationally developed guidelines for the care and handling of different species of farm animals. Codes are not intended to be used as production manuals; instead, the Codes are designed to be used as an educational tool in the promotion of sound husbandry and welfare practices. The Codes contain recommendations to assist farmers and others in the agriculture and food sector to compare and improve their own management practices.

THE RECOMMENDED CODE FOR FARMED DEER:

The Canadian deer industry recognizes the need for a national Code of Practice which addresses issues of animal welfare in balance with normal management practices. This Code was initiated by the deer industry with a review of Codes of Practice and publications from a variety of Canadian and international sources. The Canadian Federation of Humane Societies and Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada were then approached by the Canadian Venison Council and a Review Committee was selected to provide further input and develop the code.

Deer, including wapiti (North American elk), have been raised commercially in Canada for over 25 years. Historically, this has been on a small scale. However, the industry has grown significantly in the last decade as farmers seek new, economically viable and environmentally sustainable alternatives to traditional agriculture.

Species and numbers of farmed deer vary from province to province. Wapiti, red deer and fallow deer are currently considered most adaptable to farming in the Canadian environment. Deer are farmed principally for the sale of live animals, venison (meat) and velvet antler. Deer are adapted behaviourally and physiologically to regional environments. Temperate and arctic species have strong annual cycles of reproduction and metabolism which are synchronized by photoperiod (day length). These adaptations allow deer to survive winter hardships and capitalize on the brief pulse of vegetation growth.

This factsheet only highlights a small amount of the information found in the complete Recommended Code of Practice for farmed deer. A copy of the complete recommended Code of Practice can be obtained from your local commodity organization or provincial agricultural office.



HIGHLIGHTS FROM THE RECOMMENDED CODE OF PRACTICE FOR THE CARE AND HANDLING OF FARMED DEER:

SECTION 2: PRODUCERS

Producer's skills and responsibilities:

- Persons working with deer must understand and accept responsibility for the welfare of deer under their care. Employers have an obligation to train employees properly on humane handling, equipment use and livestock care and to ensure that employees follow those principles at all times.
- Prior to assignment of duties, personnel must be adequately instructed on the basic seasonal needs of the deer under their care according to species, gender and age. A working knowledge of the behaviour of deer combined with adequate facilities are necessary to ensure safe handling.

SECTION 3 : ANIMAL CONSIDERATIONS

Nutrition:

- Feeds used for conventional ruminant livestock are generally suitable for red deer, wapiti and fallow deer. Moose, reindeer, white-tailed and mule deer may require specialized diets. Deer may have different requirements for minerals such as copper, selenium or cobalt than those of sheep and cattle. These requirements may differ among deer species.
- Deer decrease food intake and metabolic activity during winter and should be in good condition before winter. Good quality balanced rations (grains, pellets or stored forage) should be provided during the winter. As intake declines, demands for high-energy feeds increase. Conversely, there are dangers of overfeeding.
- When feeding baled forage, twine and wrap must be removed to avoid illness or death from ingestion or injury from entanglement.

Pastures

- Deer are typically raised outdoors on native or seeded pastures.
- Animals on pasture must have access to a sufficient quantity and quality of feed and water. Required salt and minerals should be available.
- Animals on pasture should have access to natural or artificial shelters for protection against adverse weather conditions.

Handling

- Deer should be handled quietly, with care and patience. Familiarization of deer with handling facilities and management routine from an early age reduces apprehension.
- Many issues are related to the use of dogs to control deer. Deer that are unfamiliar with dogs may stampede into fences. Wapiti and even red deer can be dangerous to dogs. Although dogs may protect smaller deer such as fallow deer from predation, habituation of deer may reduce their natural wariness and aggressiveness against predators. If used, a dog must be well trained and experienced with deer and kept under strict control.

Breeding

- Disturbance of breeding groups during the rut should be minimized.
- Males of larger subspecies and hybrids should not be bred to females which are significantly smaller and which have not successfully reared at least one offspring.
- Females should be fed so that they are in optimal body condition just before breeding. Dietary demands are generally low during early pregnancy but increase significantly in the last stages of gestation and almost double during lactation.

Natural Mating Systems

Wapiti, red deer and fallow deer use a harem mating system in which dominant males control groups of several to over 20 females. In some situations, fallow deer may use a lek system - males compete on a central display arena. In the wild, moose, white-tailed deer and mule deer males rove widely during the rut, tending and breeding females in sequence.

Delivery and neonatal care

- Pregnant animals should be familiarized with their birthing areas several weeks prior to delivery. Pastures should be well supplied with quality forage, water and shelter from intense sunlight and inclement weather. Birthing areas should be away from potential disturbances but close to facilities. Unobtrusive surveillance should be made several times daily by a familiar individual.
- A dam that has been assisted or disturbed during birth may abandon her new-born. A contingency plan for artificial rearing must be in place.
- Newborns must consume colostrum within 12 hours to obtain nutrients and antibodies which are critical for survival. Hand-reared young should have access to palatable feed, fresh roughage and clean fresh water.

Herd Health Care

- Animals and facilities should be inspected regularly.
- A comprehensive herd-health program should be developed in consultation with a veterinarian.
- Injured and sick animals should be treated promptly, or if untreatable, humanely destroyed.

SECTION 5 : TRANSPORTATION

- Persons handling or transporting deer should be properly instructed and knowledgeable about deer behaviour and welfare and must comply with the regulations of the *Health of Animals Act*.

All codes are presently developed by a review committee made up of representatives from farm groups, animal welfare groups, veterinarians, animal scientists, federal and provincial governments, related agricultural sectors and interested individuals. The following are some of the individuals that provided input at various stages in the drafting of this code.

- Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada
- Canadian Council on Animal Care
- Canadian Federation of Humane Societies
- Canadian Meat Council
- Canadian Veterinary Medical Association
- Canadian Venison Council
- University of Alberta

In 1995, the Canadian Agri-Food Research Council (CARC) and its Canada Committee on Animals and its Expert Committee on Farm Animal Welfare and Behaviour, took the lead, along with the Canadian Federation of Humane Societies in updating existing codes and developing new commodity codes.

Further information on the process of Code Development can be obtained from the Canadian Agri-Food Research Council (CARC), Heritage House, Building 60, Central Experimental Farm, Ottawa, Ontario K1A 0C6.

Request for copies of the Codes can be addressed to the national commodity group and/or specific provincial organizations.

This factsheet was prepared by Penny Lawlis, Animal Care Inspector, Ontario Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs and reviewed by the Code of Practice Committee. This factsheet has been printed and distributed with the financial support of your provincial agricultural ministry.