

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

Bison

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 production manuals; rather, educational tools in the promotion of acceptable management 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 BISON:

Cattle and bison belong to the family Bovidae. They can be hybridized with cattle, but this practice is associated with infertility. Two bison races are recognized by the industry: plains bison and wood bison. Wood bison are currently subject to export regulations under the Convention on International Trade of Endangered Species (CITES).

Canada's plains bison population originated over a century ago from several dozen wild-caught calves that were subsequently raised on farms. Because the wild herd was in severe decline at the time, farming was instrumental in saving plains bison from extinction. Today the majority of plains bison in Canada, whether on public or private lands, are in managed herds. Recent conservation efforts to repatriate the wood bison have enhanced both wild and captive herds throughout Canada.

The recommendations contained in this code attempt to define high standards of bison production and well-being in commercial, research, and display operations, whether public or privately owned. Production and management practices are subject to change as experience grows and technology develops. Maintaining flexibility in bison production and management systems ensures continued innovation and improvement.

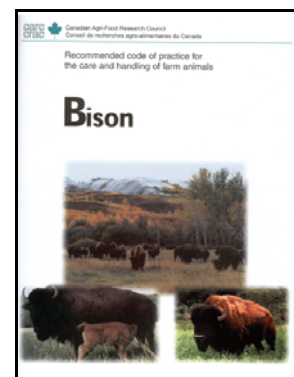
HIGHLIGHTS FROM THE RECOMMENDED CODE OF PRACTICE FOR THE CARE AND HANDLING OF FARM ANIMALS: BISON

Section 2. Herd Management

- Everyone working with bison must understand and accept responsibility for the welfare of bison under their care. Absentee owners must ensure that their bison operations are continually in the care of competent managers.
- Producers are responsible for maintaining safe and efficient facilities and are responsible for developing plans for any possible emergency.
- All those involved in the bison industry have a responsibility to take corrective action, including reporting suspected cases to authorities.

Section 3. Land, Fences and Facilities

- Pasture or range must be inspected to ensure sufficient quality and



quantity of feed and water.

- Bison should be excluded from dugouts or natural water bodies during periods when ice is unsafe. Contingency plans must address risks such as fire, storms, and vandalism.
- Bison must not gain access to potentially dangerous or toxic materials or mechanical hazards.
- Supplemental feeding areas should be properly drained. Excessive buildup of manure must be avoided.

Section 4. Handling Systems

- All facilities must be structurally safe for personnel and animals and the design must facilitate easy and safe handling of animals.
- Bison are highly susceptible to the stress of capture, restraint and handling. Bison should be handled quietly, with care and patience.
- An adequate restraining device such as a squeeze should be available for the treatment of bison.

Section 5. Feed and Water

- Supplemental feed must be offered where environmental or seasonal effects or stocking density do not allow for daily feed requirements to be met from range or pasture.
- Feeders should be designed and distributed to allow all animals (with special attention to subordinate individuals) adequate access to feed.
- Changes to concentrate rations must be made gradually to prevent digestive problems or potential death. Feed interruptions should be avoided because it may lead to subsequent over-consumption.

Section 6. Reproduction Management

- To prevent calving difficulties (dystocia) and other health problems, the timing of first breeding should take into consideration the overall physical development of the heifer.
- Under Canada's climatic conditions, bison calve outside on range or pasture.
- Bison cows should calve in clean spacious pastures. Unobtrusive surveillance should be made daily to identify difficult births or abandoned calves.
- A cow that has been assisted or disturbed may abandon her newborn calf. A contingency plan for artificial rearing of abandoned calves must be in place.
- Tagging of newborn calves is dangerous because of the protective instincts of bison cows.
- If calves are removed from their dams it should be done in a method that minimizes stress to both the cows and calves.

Section 7. Herd Health Management

- The manager of a bison operation should develop, in consultation with a veterinarian, sound herd health and sanitation programs appropriate to the facilities and management systems.
- Distressed bison must be dealt with humanely, effectively and promptly to prevent avoidable suffering.
- Sick, injured or disabled bison in severe distress must not be subjected to the additional distress of loading and transportation. These animals must be euthanised or slaughtered on the ranch.
- Care should be exercised when mixing bison with other species that may spread disease. In particular, bison should be segregated from sheep and other species that may transmit Malignant Catarrhal Fever.

Section 8. Medical and Surgical Intervention

- Medication must be administered as directed by a veterinarian who has sufficient knowledge of the conditions of use and the animals. Treatment records should be maintained for one year after the animal has left the herd.
- Only licensed veterinarians must conduct surgical procedures. Provincial veterinary acts may specify certain minor surgery that may be performed by non-veterinarians.

- Castration is seldom conducted and is neither recommended nor required.
- In adult bison, removing the tips of the horns only (tipping) is preferred to removing the entire horn. Dehorning and tipping should be done using a method that minimizes stress to the animal.
- Only trained personnel should collect semen. Manual massage is recommended but electroejaculation may be required. If so, only a small electric probe and low amperage should be used because of the potential for injuring the bull.

Section 9. Transportation

- The *Recommended Code of Practice for the Care and Handling of Farm Animals: Transportation* contains detailed recommendations and standards and should be consulted.

Section 10. Auction Markets, Exhibitions and Abattoirs

- Facilities should be routinely inspected to remove hazards. All handling or holding facilities should be regularly cleaned and supplied with fresh bedding. Floors of all pens should be paved, properly drained and scored or treated to prevent slipping.
- Loading chutes are generally used to load bison directly into closed trailers, from ground level, preferably 1.8m (6ft) wide to allow pairs or groups to load together. If required, loading ramps should be at least 76 cm (30 in.) wide to allow bison to move single file. Ramps should not be steeper than 25 degrees and preferably made of concrete with adequate grooving in the concrete. The walls of chutes and ramps should be partially closed in and have sides high enough, 2m (7 ft) to prevent animals from jumping.
- Bison should be inspected on arrival at the auction and other facilities. Any signs of abuse or neglect should be reported to the Canadian Food Inspection Agency or SPCA who may refer the complaint to local authorities. Market operators should refuse to accept animals that are clearly not in condition to be moved through their facilities without further injury or stress.
- The use of prods should be avoided when moving bison through the facility. If use of prods is considered necessary, use of both electric and other prods should be minimized. Prods must not be used in the facial, genital or anal areas.
- Orphans less than 8 days old should not be accepted for sale. Bison cow-calf pairs should not be accepted unless the calf is greater than 3 months (lost orange color). Heavily pregnant cows (within 6 weeks of expected calving) should not be offered for sale at an auction facility.
- Operators of registered establishments and all other slaughter facilities are fully responsible for humane preslaughter handling and the humane slaughter of bison on their premises.

Section 11. Humane Slaughter

- Shooting with a high-powered rifle is the recommended humane method of killing bison provided that the shot penetrates the brain causing instant unconsciousness and death without regaining consciousness. In all instances a high-powered rifle must be used because of the thick hair coat and the heavy skull covering the brain.
- Safety precautions to protect other animals and people are essential. Any person using a firearm must be licensed to do so in the particular jurisdiction.

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 organizations that provided input at various stages in the drafting of this code.

- Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada
- Alberta Agriculture, Food and Rural Development

- Canadian Council on Animal Care
- Canadian Federation of Humane Societies
- Canadian Food Inspection Agency
- Canadian Society for Animal Science
- Canadian Veterinary Medical Association
- Canadian Bison Association
- Bison Centre of Excellence
- University of Alberta
- Elk Island National Park

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), Building No. 60, Heritage House, 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.

The Canadian Bison Association strongly opposes the use of growth hormones, steroids and sub-therapeutic antibiotic feeds in the production of bison meat. Bison meat is intended to be a natural, additive-free meat and producers are strongly urged to maintain and encourage this wherever possible.