



# Working Towards a Better Understanding of Equine Welfare at the Farm Level

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# Agenda

## 1. Canadian Equine Industry

- i. Brief background
- ii. Potential welfare issues

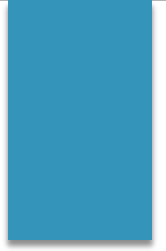
## 2. Development of an on-farm welfare assessment tool

- i. Measuring animal welfare on-farm
- ii. Assessment process

## 3. Overall results

- i. Areas of Compliance/Non-Compliance
- ii. Owner Feedback

# Canadian Equine Industry



# Background Information

- ▶ Equine industry is large and diverse
  - ▶ ~1 million horses in Canada (2010 Canadian Equine Industry Survey)
  - ▶ Meat, competitive sport, therapy, pasture ornament
  - ▶ Diversity within the industry and within single farms (Canadian Equine Industry Survey)
- ▶ Lack of a governing body which applies to **all** equines
  - ▶ Focus on sport and breed sectors
  - ▶ “Backyard” farms
  - ▶ Farm renters vs. farm owners vs. horse owners

# Equine Welfare in Canadian Industry

*“Protecting the safety and welfare of equestrians and equines equally.”*

- Equestrian Canada (Core Values)

*“The OEF is **committed to horse welfare** and providing leadership and support to the individuals, associations and industries in Ontario’s horse community.”*

- Ontario Equestrian Federation

*“To ensure that the quarter horse is **treated humanely and with dignity, respect, and compassion** at all times .”*

- Ontario Quarter Horse Association

# Potential Welfare Issues

- ▶ Individual issues
  - ▶ Lacking appropriate resources (e.g. food, water, companionship, shelter)
  - ▶ Inappropriate training practices (e.g. overworking horses, soring of gaited horses)
- ▶ Industry issues
  - ▶ Drug abuse (e.g. tail blocking/nerving, medication misuse)
  - ▶ Overpopulation

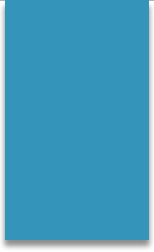
# Ignorance – Biggest threat to welfare in Canadian equine industry?

- ▶ Pervasive theme throughout all three rounds of my Delphi study
  - ▶ Individual- and industry-level concern
- ▶ Two types of ignorance:
  - ▶ lack of knowledge → “I don’t know”
  - ▶ closed ignorance → “I know all I need to know”
- ▶ Suggestion to combat this through improved owner education
  - ▶ **On-farm welfare assessments**

# Why use on-farm welfare assessments?

- ▶ Increase owner awareness about their animals (Yeates and Main 2009)
  - ▶ Numerical values – e.g. lameness prevalence (Kirchner *et al.* 2014)
- ▶ Open discussion about Improving welfare (Yeates and Main 2009)
  - ▶ Provides feedback regarding current practices (Sischo *et al.* 1997)





However, on-farm  
assessments are  
extremely unusual  
for Canadian  
horse farm owners

# Project Goals

- ▶ Determine owner awareness of on-farm welfare risks
- ▶ Compare self-assessment to on-farm assessment results
- ▶ Document owner response and feedback to an on-farm welfare assessment process



# On-Farm Welfare Assessment Tool

# Creating an On-Farm Assessment Tool

- ▶ Utilized measures documented in existing scientific literature
  - ▶ Animal-based (what the animal tells us)
  - ▶ Resource-based (what does the animal have access to)
  - ▶ Management-based (how is the animal cared for)
- ▶ Used standards (requirements) outlined in **National Farm Animal Care Council's Code of Practice**

# Assessment tool

- ▶ **Section 1: Husbandry and current management practices**
  - ▶ Staffing, training of staff and volunteers, turnout and stabling, pasture management, and exercise regimens
- ▶ **Section 2: Indoor Environment**
  - ▶ Lighting, barn dimensions, and bedding evaluations
- ▶ **Section 3: Outdoor Environment**
  - ▶ Fence type, gate size, presence/absence of adequate shelter

# Assessment tool

- ▶ **Section 4: Safety**

- ▶ Evaluation of emergency preparedness

- ▶ **Section 5: Equine Assessment**

- ▶ Ocular and nasal discharge
- ▶ Hoof status
- ▶ Injury score
- ▶ Body condition score
- ▶ Lameness

# Pilot Test Farms (n=26)

- ▶ Farms within 200km of Guelph or Newmarket, Ontario
- ▶ Between 4 and 99 horses per farm
- ▶ Trail riding, therapy, A-circuit showing, private boarding, horse rental, Western pleasure, English pleasure = **diverse range of uses for horses**

# Assessment Process

## ▶ (1) Self Assessment

- ▶ Yes/No questionnaire with open-comment sections
- ▶ Same sections as assessment tool

## ▶ (2) On-farm Assessment

- ▶ ~4 hr assessment
- ▶ One trainee assessor + myself



# Assessment Process

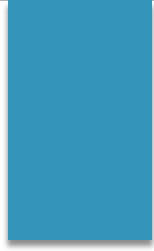
## ▶ (3) Post-Assessment Interview

- ▶ Review and discuss the results of welfare assessment
- ▶ Participate in a brief interview about:
  - ▶ Value of tool to industry
  - ▶ Additions or changes
  - ▶ Overall impression and feedback

# Assessment Process

- ▶ Pre- and post-assessments used to help determine owner's:
  - ▶ (a) perception of their own facility
  - ▶ (b) reaction to an on-farm welfare assessment process
- ▶ **Why does this matter?**
  - ▶ Highlight areas where more education may be necessary
  - ▶ On-farm assessments likely to be incentive-driven

# Overall Results



# Owner Self-Evaluation

- ▶ Farm owners most often **UNDERESTIMATED** the prevalence of structural issues in their facilities (e.g. ceiling heights, stall sizes)
- ▶ Farm owners most often **ACCURATELY** estimated management-related elements (e.g. stall cleanliness, provision of resources)
- ▶ Farm owners most often **OVERESTIMATED** the security risks on their farm (e.g. absence of a fire extinguisher)

# On-farm assessment Outcomes

- ▶ Time allotment: 4 hours
  - ▶ Average time taken: 2.5 hrs
  - ▶ Took longer if the facility had more horses and if more horses were housed indoors
- ▶ Most common risks were structural (40-70%) and safety (31-88%)
- ▶ All barns were lit, had dry stalls, and provided water indoors

# Farm Manager Feedback

- ▶ Overall positive response to the process
- ▶ Value as an educational tool
  - ▶ Information about own farm
  - ▶ Exposure to new resources
  - ▶ Areas for future improvement
- ▶ Many suggestions for future assessments

# Usefulness to the Industry

- ▶ For newcomers or those “just starting out”
  - ▶ Provides standards and guidelines
- ▶ As a welfare certification program
  - ▶ Inform potential boarders about the quality of the facility
  - ▶ Give credibility to farm owners

# Owner Concerns

- ▶ Horse or property ownership
  - ▶ Farm renters vs. owners
- ▶ Pre-existing conditions that might compromise welfare
  - ▶ E.g. laminitis
- ▶ Financial difficulties
- ▶ Who would conduct on-farm assessments?



# Conclusions

- ▶ On-farm assessments offer an individualized approach
  - ▶ Help combat ignorance in industry
- ▶ Basic needs on-farm welfare assessment takes between 2.5 to 4 hrs. to conduct
- ▶ Positive reception from farm owners
  - ▶ Educational opportunity
  - ▶ Certification

# Questions and Discussion

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# References

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