

Dairy Management Practices in Alberta and its Accordance to the Code of Practices

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The recently revised Dairy Code of Practice establishes requirements and recommendations for the care of dairy cattle. The purpose of this study was to measure producer awareness of the codes and to determine the extent to which on-farm management procedures comply with the code's requirements and recommendations. A total of 83 Albertan dairy farms with at least 75 Holstein lactating cows housed in free stalls were assessed. Producers were asked to fill out a questionnaire on their knowledge of the Code of Practice, as well as a questionnaire describing their management practices adopted on the farm. A subset of 14 questions from the management questionnaire and 7 in-barn measurements were selected for code compliance analysis. The majority of producers (73%) were aware of the code but only 53% of the producers have read it. On average, there was 63% compliance with the chosen code of practice management items. None of the farms were in accordance with all 14 items. Higher compliance occurred in areas such as lameness detection, hoof-trimming schedule, and calving assistance. Lower compliance occurred in areas of bedding management, strategy for treating lameness and veterinary consultation in developing calving protocol. For in-barn measurements, high compliance was seen in stocking density and body condition scores, while low compliance was seen in lameness scores and feed space allowance. 34% of the producers have made management changes as a result of the code.

The results demonstrate that code compliance is variable despite awareness being high and that producers are making changes to their practices based on code recommendations. Additional efforts in producer outreach are necessary to further encourage code compliance.