

Revised Dairy Code of Practice: What Will it Really Mean for Us?

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■ Take Home Messages

- ▶ The Canadian Codes of Practice and the Canadian dairy industry's proAction® program are well-respected both domestically and internationally, making Canadian dairy farmers a trusted source of nutritious, ethically produced food.
- ▶ To maintain this status and credibility, dairy farmers need to keep up with existing science and understand stakeholder expectations. This is achieved through the regular revision of the Code of Practice for the Care and Handling of Dairy Cattle (the Dairy Code of Practice) and the proAction program.
- ▶ The revised Code of Practice was published in March 2023, and it was developed through the careful evaluation of applicable science, current practices, and feedback from all stakeholders through the public comment process. This work was done by an 18-person code committee that included participants from across Canada such as dairy farmers, animal welfare and enforcement representatives, processors, researchers, veterinarians, industry experts and government representatives.
- ▶ Hundreds of dairy farmers contributed comments in the public consultation period. Thanks to the practical comments and observations of farmers who work, day in and day out, with dairy animals, the new Code of Practice is more practical and clearer in its requirements than the original draft.
- ▶ Many of the revisions of the Code of Practice are already being followed by dairy farmers through the current requirements of the proAction program.
- ▶ For those new impactful requirements not already covered in proAction, Dairy Farmers of Canada is thoughtfully evaluating how to incorporate those changes in manner that is effective and practical. These changes are expected to go live no earlier than September 2025.
- ▶ It is important to note that provincial animal enforcement authorities may expect the Code requirements to be met by the Code live dates (earliest being April 2024) in the case of an animal care investigation, regardless of the requirement status in proAction.

■ What is the Code?

Canada's Codes of Practice are a powerful tool for meeting rising consumer, marketplace, and societal expectations relative to farmed animal welfare. Codes support responsible animal care practices and keep everyone involved in farmed animal care and handling on the same page. The Codes are developed in a partnership between the National Farm Animal Care Council (NFACC) and livestock industry groups.

The Dairy Code of Practice includes important requirements for animal care, ensuring the dairy industry's practices remain scientifically informed, practical, and relevant to societal expectations for responsible farm animal care.

Codes of Practice are expected to be revised every ten years. The Dairy Code of Practice just completed this revision process in 2023.

NFACC's Code development process is a unique consensus-based, multi-stakeholder approach that ensures credibility and transparency through scientific rigour, stakeholder collaboration, and consistency. The development of the revised Dairy Cattle Code was led by an 18-person code committee that included participants from across Canada such as dairy farmers, animal welfare and enforcement representatives, processors, researchers, veterinarians, industry experts and government representatives.

Aiding in their work was a five-person scientific committee that included animal science and veterinary expertise in dairy cattle behaviour, health, and welfare. A public comment period was held from November 29, 2021 – January 27, 2022, to allow the public and all stakeholders to provide input. Participation in the feedback process was excellent, and farmer input had a clear impact on the resulting revised version.

▪ **Why was the Code Revised?**

All Codes of Practice are expected to be reviewed every ten years. The Dairy Code of Practice was last published in 2009. Since then, practices, expectations, and research findings have evolved. Consumers and government are taking note of the high standards and the efforts of the industry to keep pace with societal expectations and the evolving research in animal care practices. The new Code of Practice reflects this.

▪ **How do the Code and proAction Work Together and When Will I be Impacted?**

Many of the requirements included in the revised Code of Practice are already covered by the proAction program and so farmers are already meeting them. For the completely new elements, some farms are already implementing these practices on farm, or are moving toward them as part of their natural business evolution.

The proAction committees will make recommendations to the Dairy Farmers of Canada (DFC) Board of Directors regarding incorporating the new or revised requirements into the program, as appropriate. At this time, it is anticipated that changes to proAction will begin in September 2025; however, this will be subject to committee recommendations and DFC Board approval.

Requirements from the revised Code of Practice for the Care and Handling of Dairy Cattle become 'live' April 1st, 2024 (12 months post-publication) unless otherwise stated in individual requirements. This means provincial animal enforcement organizations may still expect that these requirements are met by their live dates in the case of an animal care investigation, regardless of the requirement status in proAction.

Some farms may find some changes more challenging than other farms and may need to plan investments in their barns to meet the new requirements. The Code of Practice recognizes that such investments will take time and could be significant for some farms, and therefore provides up to eight years to implement some of the more impactful changes.

▪ **What Are the Most Impactful Changes to Requirements?**

The biggest changes in the new Code of Practice compared to the 2009 code are the requirements to provide more opportunity for social contact for pre-weaned calves (Figure 1), and more opportunity for movement for lactating and dry cows (Figures 2 and 3). Both are supported by science in promoting overall good welfare.

REQUIREMENTS (continued on next page)**For all calf housing systems:**

Housing must allow calves to easily stand up, lie down, turn completely around, stand fully upright (without touching the top of the enclosure), adopt sternal and lateral resting postures, groom themselves, and have visual contact with other cattle.

The bedded area for group-housed calves must be large enough to allow all calves to rest comfortably at the same time.

Where tethering of calves is permitted, the tether must include a collar.

For indoor calf housing:

Calves must not be tethered as part of normal indoor housing.

Producers raising calves individually must develop a plan to transition to pair/group housing methods, in consultation with a veterinarian or other qualified advisor.

Effective April 1, 2031, calves that are healthy, thriving, and compatible must be housed in pairs or groups by 4 weeks of age.¹

¹ Movement into pairs/groups may need to be delayed for individual calves that are not healthy and thriving. Once moved into pairs/groups, individual calves may need to be singly housed temporarily if they have a health condition that would improve with separation. Movement into pairs/groups may also need to be delayed to ensure there are sufficient number of calves that are compatible as to their age, size, and drinking speed.

*Section 2 - Facilities and Housing***REQUIREMENTS (continued)****Hutches and other outdoor housing:**

Calves housed outdoors, including in hutches, must have physical contact with another calf unless they need to be separated for health reasons or they need to be protected from inclement weather.

Calves may be tethered only if housed in hutches that provide access to an area outside the hutch.

Figure 1. Pre-weaned calf housing requirements from the Revised Dairy Code of Practice 2023

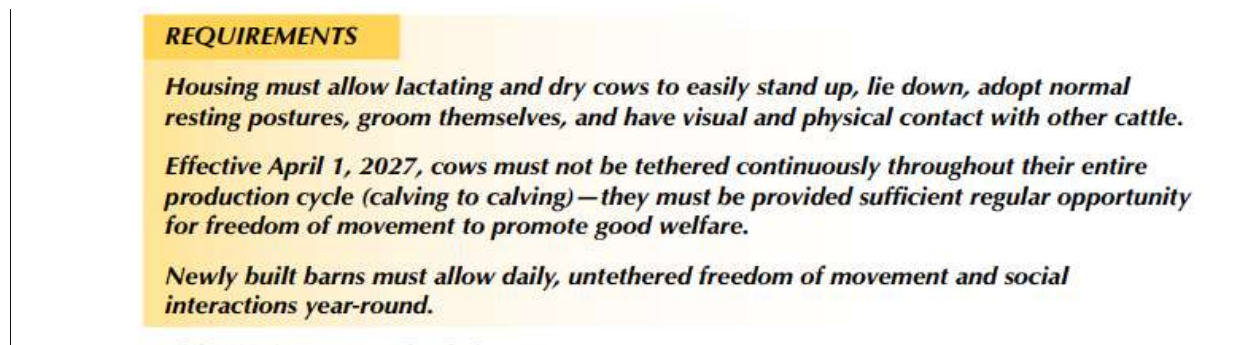


Figure 2. Lactating and dry cow housing requirements from the Revised Dairy Code of Practice 2023

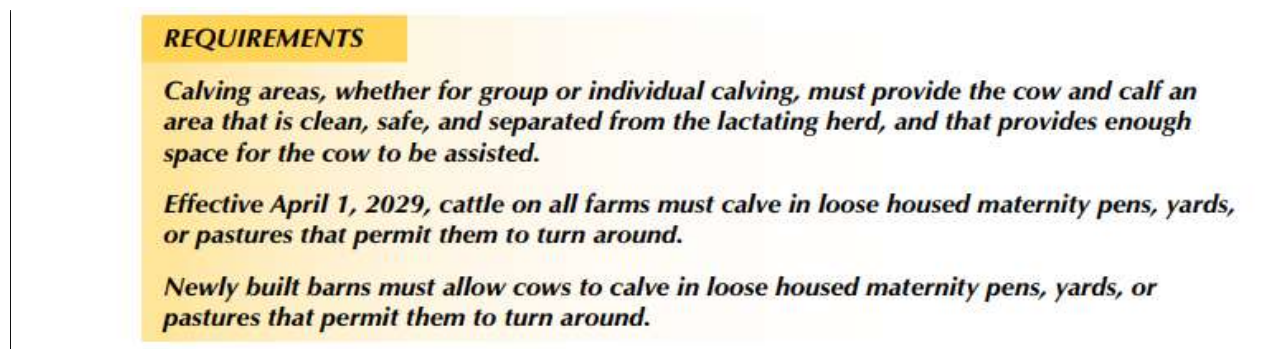


Figure 3. Calving area requirements from the Revised Dairy Code of Practice 2023

The code committee allowed more time to meet the new requirements deemed to have significant impact (financial, infrastructure or otherwise). This allows time for farmers to find the best solutions for their farms with the support of their farm care team.

▪ Who do I Contact if I Have More Questions?

Reach out to your provincial producer association office with any questions related to the Revised Code of Practice.

▪ References

National Farm Animal Care Council Dairy Code:

<https://www.nfacc.ca/codes-of-practice/dairy-cattle>

proAction Animal Care Resources:

<https://www.dairyfarmers.ca/proaction/resources/animal-care>

DFC's Path to On-Farm Excellence Podcast:

<https://open.spotify.com/show/2SIOSlxjARKslPcE0NrdnL>



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