

Millions of livestock transported annually on Alberta roads have an innovative new safeguard to support their care and welfare. A major announcement today in Ponoka, Alta., unveiled a fleet of state-of-the-art livestock emergency handling equipment trailers, set for deployment in key areas of the province. Also announced was a new training course under development to support qualified workers operating and using these “livestock ER” trailers.

Both developments stemmed from discussions initiated by the Alberta Farmed Animal Health and Welfare Strategy Steering Committee. The Steering Committee was inspired by the vision and forethought of groups in Red Deer County and Ponoka that developed similar livestock handling trailers for deployment in their areas. A sub-committee including representatives from the Alberta Equestrian Federation, the Alberta Beef Producers, Livestock Identification Services, RCMP, Alberta Farm Animal Care (AFAC) and Alberta Agriculture and Rural Development created the initial project plan. Funding support was provided through the federal/provincial/territorial Growing Forward initiative.

“The Harper Government is committed to supporting industry leadership in farm animal care and this project is an excellent example of industry innovation,” says Member of Parliament Blaine Calkins (Wetaskiwin), on behalf of federal Agriculture Minister Gerry Ritz. “Transport is a critical component of livestock production and these new trailers and the accompanying training program will help ensure safe and humane handling of livestock when issues or emergency situations arise.”

“The health and welfare of animals is always one of our top priorities,” says Verlyn Olson, Minister of Alberta Agriculture and Rural Development. “We are very pleased to partner with AFAC. These new resources will strengthen our capacity to respond to accidents or challenges involving livestock and will support the safety and well-being of both people and animals on our farms and roadways.”

Several counties / municipalities and one non-profit organization were chosen as trailer sites, based on animal movement volumes and strategic coordination plans. These include MD of Willowcreek – Claresholm; Cypress County – Medicine Hat; Westlock County – Westlock; Vermilion River County – Vermilion; and the Alberta Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (ASPCA), which will deploy an Alberta-wide roaming unit.

The training course will be delivered by Lakeland College, as a new “Livestock Handling Equipment Trailer Training Course” at the college’s Emergency Training Centre at Vermilion, Alta.

While most people involved with livestock are adequately equipped to handle animals, incidents can arise where proper livestock handling equipment is not readily available. The new resources are an important step to expand the reach and fast deployment of these tools, says Heini Hehli, a Rimbey-Alta.-area dairy producer and Chair of AFAC.

“As livestock producers, we know that livestock care doesn’t end when animals leave the farm,” says Hehli. “Safe transport is a top priority and an area where we have long worked with the transportation industry, those involved in emergency response, and different levels of government, to continually improve approaches and resources. This type of teamwork is absolutely essential to livestock care progress. This is a very hands-on project that will benefit the entire livestock industry in Alberta.”

AFAC is a partnership of the major livestock producer organizations of Alberta, along with affiliate and associate members, dedicated to promoting responsible, humane farm animal care. Learn more at www.afac.ab.ca . More information on Growing Forward in Alberta is available at www.growingforward.alberta.ca .