

Farm animal care champions recognized with AFAC Awards of Distinction

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Two outstanding contributors to advancing farm animal care in Alberta were presented with Alberta Farm Animal Care (AFAC) Awards of Distinction at the Livestock Care Conference in Olds, March 14-15. The AFAC Awards of Distinction recognize those who have made exceptional contributions in the field of livestock welfare. These individuals or organizations work hard to advance the mandate of AFAC and the welfare of livestock in Alberta.

The Award of Distinction for Communication was presented to the East Olds Dairy Farmers group for its Breakfast on the Dairy Farm initiative. The Award of Distinction for Industry Leadership went to Lakeland College for its high standards and ongoing commitment to animal welfare.

"Each year we hand out awards to those who are driving innovation and highlighting what is advancing our industry forward – this year is no exception," says Annemarie Pedersen, Executive Director of AFAC.

"The East Olds Dairy Farmers group and the Lakeland College program are true examples of what we can achieve when we work together.

Six years ago the East Olds Dairy Farmers group, which is made up of several dairy farm families, developed the idea to host a breakfast for their community to help the public learn about what dairy farmers do. With the support of the Southern Alberta Holstein Club and Alberta Milk the first Breakfast on the Dairy Farm event was delivered in 2013 drawing 348 people to a single location. The initiative has carried on as an annual series, expanding to two locations hosting over 1,000 people each year. It provides an opportunity for members of the public to connect with farmers and experience first-hand what life on a dairy farm is all about.

Plans are underway to add a third location for a northern event for 2018. Since the first year, the



Photo courtesy AFAC
Members of the East Olds Dairy Farmers group accepted the AFAC Award of Distinction for Communication at the 2018 Livestock Care Conference. Left to right: Larry Arvey, Theo Van der Gun, Martien Huyzer, Miranda Verhoeff, Arte Van den Broek and Lorrie Jespersen (presenter).

events have reached over 3,400 consumers with the support of 350 volunteers. "Good communication is one of the most important things in life," says Arte Van den Broek, a milk producer involved in the project since its inception. "We as producers like to show where the milk comes from, how we take care of our animals and our neighbours. Open that farm gate and let people come in – that's what we always say."

This event has gone a long way to help build trust with consumers, says Lorrie Jespersen, an Alberta Milk board director who presented the award. "Social licence needs to be earned. This event has been executed impeccably through authentic

conversations, experiences and answering questions honestly and factually to ensure the integrity of dairy farmers and farming in general remains intact."

Lakeland College is another deserving award winner, having evolved into a leading institution for education and leadership in farm animal care. Among key examples of the college's focus on livestock welfare, students in the Animal Science Technology Program complete an entire semester of animal handling, welfare and ethics during their first year of studies alone.

"It's great to have these students come in the fall, who haven't really been exposed to too much of animal welfare training and then watch them throughout the semester," says program instructor Marisa Schuebel. "The classroom is just a small part and then a lot of learning is done out on our farm where we get to teach handling and really go through the nitty gritty, hands-on things these students are going to face in industry."

The hands-on lab component teaches students low-stress handling techniques in many types of situations, such as handling facilities and pasture settings. "At the college there is a high standard for animal welfare and care," says Lakeland College student Hayley Clark, who presented the award. "It has provided me with opportunities to learn animal handling in a safe environment as well as the confidence and skills needed to head out into the industry."

More information on the Livestock Care Conference is available on the AFAC website, at www.afac.ab.ca, including photos and blog items. Communication via sermo.farm from the 2018 Livestock Care Conference is sponsored in part by Poultry Partners and Country Junction Feeds.



Instructors Jessica Hryciuk (left) and Marisa Schuebel (right) accepted the AFAC Award of Distinction for Industry Leadership on behalf of Lakeland College at the 2018 Livestock Care Conference. Award presented by Hayley Clark (middle), Animal Science Technician.