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### **Awards recognize Alberta innovators in livestock care**

Calgary, Alta., April 6, 2005: Alberta's livestock industry saluted three outstanding leaders in promoting livestock care in the province, at the recent Livestock Care Conference, April 1, in Red Deer.

"Our goal with these Awards of Distinction is to draw attention to those in our industry who have worked hard to advance the mandate of animal care," says Aart Okkema, Chairman of Alberta Farm Animal Care (AFAC), which hosted the Conference. "This year, we recognized three leaders who have taken the extra step to really be innovative in the interest of animal care in their respective areas. All are tremendous assets and ambassadors for the Alberta livestock industry."

The Award of Distinction for Industry Leadership was presented to Dr. Matt Schoonderwoerd, Director of Veterinary Affairs and Pork Quality for Olymel in Red Deer, for his efforts in promoting food safety and animal welfare. Schoonderwoerd was a lead advocate for integrating these components into the pork industry's Canadian Quality Assurance Program, a HACCP-based program providing for food safety, product quality and production integrity.

"Matt was one of the first in Alberta to say that we needed to do something about food safety and animal welfare," says Sarah Turner, Manager of Alberta Quality Pork. "He was a leader in the province in the developing the CQA program. It would not be where it is if not for him."

Among other accomplishments, Schoonderwoerd has led the implementation of an innovative internal auditing system for animal welfare at Olymel. This system assesses animal welfare from the plant's barn to the kill floor, with audits performed daily at random times. Schoonderwoerd also was the first to set up a data collection system to report the health of status of an animal back to the producer. This feedback system is used extensively to communicate with producers and help them to improve the care given to animals before they enter the plant.

The Award of Distinction for Communication was awarded to Debbie Lee, who for over 20 years has delivered the message that farmers care for their animals, through milking demonstrations at public venues such as the Calgary Stampede, Klondike Days and Aggie Days.

"Debbie puts a face on agriculture that we can all be very proud of," says Susan Church, Manager of AFAC. "She does a fast-paced highly interactive presentation. The crowds - kids, parents, teachers and even old-time farmers love it. She has honed her delivery and responses to continuously reinforce the constant care and attention farmers provide their livestock."

The Award of Distinction for Innovation was presented to Plain Lake Colony, for its innovative free run system for hens. The system is designed to house the birds in an open area, rather than in

cages, on slatted floors separated by nest boxes and an automatic egg collection system that runs down the middle of the barn. The slatted floor areas are equipped with water and feed dispensers. The barn also has multi-level perches for roosting. Belts run under the slatted floors to allow manure removal.

"The Plain Lake system has not just improved the welfare for the birds," says Dr. John Church, leader of the Livestock Welfare Unit for Alberta Agriculture, Food and Rural Development (AAFRD). "According to Mike Hofer of Plain Lake, it has produced an immediate increase in egg quality - in shell strength, cleanliness and consistency. This reinforces the message that that good animal welfare generally means improved productivity or better quality."

The system is one that would be achievable for most Canadian producers, adds Church. "It's a very practical and effective system, and this achievement comes as no surprise. I've always been impressed with the culture of animal care and stewardship at Plain Lake Colony." The colony has also drawn praise for its innovative group housing of gestation sows.

"We went to group housing in sows and loose housing in the birds because we wanted to be leaders in the industry and show consumers our animals are well treated," says Ben Hofer, who accepted the award on behalf of the colony.

"All of our industries stand behind what the egg producers say in their animal care statement: 'Egg producers are always looking for ways to improve production practices,'" says Susan Church, Manager of AFAC. "Plain Lake Colony is an excellent example of this."

AFAC is a partnership of Alberta's major livestock groups, with a mandate to promote responsible, humane animal care within the livestock industry. The Livestock Care Conference drew more than 100 participants, including producers, industry, researchers and extension. More information is available at [www.afac.ab.ca](http://www.afac.ab.ca).

-30-

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