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Portable Calf Housing (Hutches) Guideline

Operational Guideline 2023-1

Agricultural Operation Practices Act
December 20, 2023

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1. Introduction

Portable calf housing is no longer viewed as short-term manure storage under the *Agricultural Operation Practices Act* (AOPA). Short-term manure storage allows for the temporary storage of solid manure prior to land application and is not to be used for the housing and raising of livestock. See [Short-Term Solid Manure Storage Requirements](#) fact sheet.

2. Guideline as of September 25, 2023

- 2.1 Operators wanting to use portable calf hutches to confine some, or all, of their livestock at above AOPA permit threshold numbers, will require a permit under AOPA. Contact your local NRCB office for information on threshold levels.

If an operator wishes to apply for an AOPA permit for an above-threshold confined feeding operation (CFO) using portable calf hutches, approval officers will process the application as they would any other CFO application. The applicant will need to demonstrate that they can meet all applicable AOPA requirements, including groundwater resource protection and surface water control system (Standards and Administration Regulation, sections 6, 7, and 9).

- 2.2 Operators possessing a document issued by the NRCB, dated before September 25, 2023, regarding their portable calf hutch operations will be allowed to continue to operate under the terms of the document. If non-compliance is found regarding any of the conditions stated in the NRCB document, the operator will be required to obtain an AOPA permit. However, for compliance purposes, inspectors may at any time inspect the site and request a copy of a detailed plan. This plan must include the rotation schedule and the location of the lands to be used for the placement of the calf hutches, as well as the number of calves listed in the original document.

- 2.3 Operators housing calves in portable hutches (and other confinement areas such as pens), below AOPA threshold numbers and with no other livestock on site, will not require an AOPA permit. However, animal numbers must remain below the AOPA permitting threshold. Operators are responsible for making themselves aware of any municipal requirements, as municipalities have jurisdiction for CFOs that are below AOPA permit thresholds.

3. Compliance and enforcement

If a possible risk to the environment is identified at any operation, an NRCB inspector can investigate. This is the same process for all confined feeding operations in Alberta.

Other circumstances that may trigger compliance action include:

1. The operator no longer meets the requirements of the original NRCB document.
2. Calf numbers at the operation exceed those stated in the original NRCB document.
3. If animal numbers were not specified in the original NRCB document, operators must provide evidence to the NRCB demonstrating their animal numbers as of September 25, 2023. Should the operation exceed those numbers, an NRCB permit will be required.
4. Operations with livestock numbers that exceed the AOPA permitting threshold, without an NRCB issued document, will need to obtain an AOPA permit.

5. Transitional operators

Some operators may be caught by the NRCB's updated approach to portable calf housing (hutches). These operators may have made decisions with financial implications, and may have formed expectations, based on discussion with the NRCB prior to September 25, 2023, but do not have documentation from the NRCB. These operators may fall within a "transitional group".

In these cases, these operators need to contact the NRCB. The NRCB may allow these transitional operators to operate under an approved written plan, and report on the rotation of the portable calf housing (hutches). Typically, this plan requires moving these portable hutches a sizeable distance. This is to allow the area where the hutch was located to get a rest period and to encourage vegetation (for grazing or crops) to uptake nutrients and manage soil nutrient loading.

6. Reasons for updated approach

In the early days of AOPA, portable calf hutches were to be moved regularly. During this time, the NRCB informed some operators that they did not need a permit and some operators possess documents from the NRCB to that effect. There was also a time when portable calf-hutch operations were viewed as seasonal feeding and bedding sites. However, many operations have not complied with the direction provided by the NRCB (e.g. regularly moving the hutches).

As portable calf housing (hutch) operations have evolved, so too has the NRCB's approach to regulating the impacts from these facilities. This is partly due to changes in how the operations are managed and how these facilities are growing in number and scale. The NRCB has also recognized there is an emerging and growing market for feeder calves. The NRCB's updated approach is in response to these changes.

Portable calf housing (hutches) are considered to be CFOs. They may require an NRCB-issued permit (registration or approval) if calf numbers exceed AOPA thresholds, and if the operation is not associated with a cow-calf overwintering operation. It is important to understand that portable calf housing (hutches) not only store manure, they also house livestock (calves). For that reason, a calf hutch is a manure collection area, a manure storage facility, and a livestock confinement facility.

Note: Dairies with Calf Hutches

Calves at dairies are generally replacements. However, for clarity, if additional calves (not offspring of the milking cows) are purchased or obtained, and are being raised at the dairy, additional permits may be required.

We encourage all operators to contact the NRCB with any questions.

Contact the Natural Resources Conservation Board at the following offices. Dial 310-0000 to be connected toll free.

Edmonton Office

4th Floor, Sterling Place
9940 - 106 Street
Edmonton AB T5K 2N2
T 780-422-1977

Airdrie Office

Airdrie Agricultural Regional Centre
97 East Lake Ramp NE
Airdrie AB T4A 0C3
T 403-340-5241

Lethbridge Office

Agriculture Centre
100, 5401 - 1 Avenue S
Lethbridge AB T1J 4V6
T 403-381-5166

Morinville Office

Provincial Building
201, 10008 - 107 Street
Morinville AB T8R 1L3
T 780-939-1212

Red Deer Office

Provincial Building
303, 4920 - 51 Street
Red Deer AB T4N 6K8
T 403-340-5241

NRCB Reporting Line: 1-866-383-6722

Email: info@nrcb.ca

Web address: www.nrcb.ca

Copies of the *Agricultural Operation Practices Act* can be obtained from the King's Printer at www.alberta.ca/alberta-kings-printer or through the NRCB website.

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