

March 15th, 2020

The Quiet Advocate

While the cows are being milked and the plow shear is folding the furrows in the field, the farmer is unaware of the crucial meetings in Ottawa.

For more than four years a group has diligently digested facts, figures, statistics, records, evidence and historical data. The consequential documents are thick with line after line of precise intent. There is no allowance for misinterpretation. Words matter. When the protection of human life safety is the focus, the group is universally galvanized by purpose. Common Sense does not have a seat at the table, but its presence permeates the deliberations.

The Canadian Farm Builders Association is represented at these meetings, which are under the jurisdiction of the National Research Council of Canada. The NRCC is revising the National Building Code of Canada. The National Farm Building Code is part of the NBC. It has not been updated since 1995. This Code is unique to farm structures and of critical importance for the farm community. As a National Code it is optional for Provincial authorities to adopt the NFBC, in whole or, in part. Historically, Ontario has adopted the NFBC. The committee that is responsible for the Farm Code section is called the Joint Task Force. On this committee there is one farm building contractor, (*Gary van Bolderen, owner of Dutch Masters Construction Services*) and one Structural Engineer, (*Will Teron, of Tacoma Engineers*), who has a long and respected history of designing farm buildings. The other members of the JTF have no relationship with agriculture or the farm building industry. Their invaluable contribution is their technical expertise to ensure structural integrity and life safety standards are met.

The diversity of the participants, who have unique knowledge and expertise, will author the revisions to the NFBC. The superiority of technical expertise is often challenged by the necessity to consider the practical application of the Code on the farm. The diversity of opinions is the crucible that allows the cream to rise to the top.

The CFBA involvement on the committee is twofold. The overriding responsibility is to ensure that the NFBC is a creditable document that will protect the lives of the people who use farm structures. The other responsibility is to ensure the

NFBC is a benefit for the farm owner/operator. The JTF relies on the CFBA for affirmation that the Code can be used on the farm as a working document. As an advocate for safe buildings and for practical design solutions, the CFBA is working for the interest of the farm community. The application of science, acknowledging the historical record, and the recognition that the code must be practical, are the ingredients of a useful building code. The test of a well written building code is that it will benefit the farmer and the public interest.

For 40 years the farm building industry has worked with farm organizations, the Ontario Building Officials, the Ontario Ministry of Food and Rural Affairs, engineers, and the construction industry to support the farm community with better service and products. It has made submissions to government regarding public policy issues that affect farm buildings, skilled labour supply, Workers Safety and Insurance Board (WSIB), safety training, etc.. The CFBA sets the gold standard in qualified farm building construction. The driving force for the CFBA has always been to advocate for the interest of the farmer. We know that a successful farmer, and a healthy agricultural sector, are not only in our interest, but in the public interest.

As the farmer begins a new head row with his plow and the polished stainless steel milk truck, glinting in the afternoon sun, is turning into the lane, the work of the JTF meetings goes on.

What should be the longest travel distance of egress be from within the farm structure? Is an underfloor manure storage in a farrowing barn a confined space? Should hazardous materials be stored in a separated area? What specifications should be mandated for concrete used to construct a manure storage? Should a second floor in a poultry barn have a fire rating? Can a farm structure have more than one type of occupancy? Do the snow load and wind load design factors need to be updated? Should methane gas detectors be mandatory? Should the code limit the size of a farm structure? When do seismic loads have to be considered? Should egress people doors always swing out? What type of latch should be specified on fire exit doors? Should electrical back up systems be mandatory for some types of farm structure uses?

The volunteers of the CFBA are an equal participant in the work of the Task Force. It is vital that the voice of the farmer and the farm building contractors are “in the room” when decisions are made.

The Canadian Farm Builders Association is “The Quiet Advocate” that continues supporting the farm owners and operators to strengthen the agricultural sector.

Authored and submitted by Mr. Gary van Bolderen

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