**Search for Excellence in Livestock Production**

**Livestock Education & Certification for Agriculture Law Enforcement (LECALE)**

**Introduction:** This week-long program was developed in partnership between Florida Farm Bureau, The University of Florida, and local sheriff offices to address a need of in-field training on livestock health and management topics for law enforcement personnel. An increasing trend of instances of livestock neglect and disputes was recognized between agencies along with lack of knowledge by the responding officers to make determinations of animal well-being. It should also be noted that law enforcement personnel who wanted training in livestock production had to seek providers outside of Florida as there was no “in-house” education available prior to the inception of the Livestock Education & Certification for Agriculture Law Enforcement (LECALE) program. Committees across law enforcement agencies and the University of Florida alongside Farm Bureau began to develop curriculum and training materials for a certification process to provide an industry-recognized credential to graduates that would validate the skills and knowledge of the individuals.

**Objectives:** The objective for this program is to educate law enforcement personnel on generally accepted livestock production practices and teach skills to discern acceptable animal well-being. An emphasis is placed on providing ample opportunities for participants to apply acquired knowledge and skills in field settings and during mock litigation proceedings throughout this event. This program largely focuses on beef cattle and equine but touches on all livestock species. Overall, we want to see a 100% exam pass rate and certification along with an increase in knowledge throughout the week. Our team will follow up with attendees to confirm the importance of this training in their daily work. Topics covered include animal husbandry, identification of animals, behavior and handling, nutrition and feeding, pasture management, disease and biosecurity, euthanasia, body condition scoring, and live animal evaluations.

**Program Activities:** This program is a week-long and has been offered four times under the current leadership (2022-2024).This course is led by University of Florida Animal Sciences Department faculty with many of the educational topics delivered by University of Florida County Extension faculty. A partnership with local law enforcement and past program attendees allows for case study discussions and real-world teaching examples throughout the week. Legal topics are presented by members of the Florida Bar. This program has classroom learning and hands-on learning components that take place on local farm operations. We travel to both equine and beef cattle farms to discuss animal handling, identification, and body condition and welfare, allowing participants to practice skills. Marketing efforts for this program include an email list and largely word of mouth from previous attendees and their respective agencies.

**Teaching Methods:** Teaching law enforcement officers with responsibilities in livestock management how to discern proper animal treatment and care based on animal condition and type and how to safely work with and around these animals will allow them to perform their job more effectively. To begin, participants receive a binder full of supplemental information and curriculum to accompany the week-long learning. The classroom lectures are designed to introduce new concepts and allow for conversational-style learning. Each concept is then further applied when we travel to on farm sites and practice the concepts with live animals, such as applying body condition scores to a set of cows or horses, using what was learned about cattle behavior and handling to safely pen up a group of cattle, and using a mock example of an animal neglect case to write a thorough case report using the details of the scene. After each day participants must complete a homework assignment due the following morning. To drive home learning objectives there are quizzes each morning on the material from the day prior. On the final day of the program attendees must pass a two-part exam for certification. The first part of the exam is a hands-on evaluation of skills in the field. Then, they must pass a written exam. Multiple areas of agriculture law enforcement are represented in the class of attendees, such as deputies with sheriff departments, animal control officers, and Florida Department of Agriculture & Consumer Services inspectors. This allows networking across agencies to better assist in criminal cases involving livestock depending on the needs of the case.

**Results:** Since 2022, four classes havebeen administered to a total of 86 participants. There has been a 100% certification rate with overall knowledge gain of 40%, measured as the difference in initial and final written test scores.

**Impact:** LECALE has become widely recognized among law enforcement agencies and the demand for the class is consistent. Marketing this program is simple, as there is generally a wait list from the previous year and a large base of contacts through partner agencies. Having this Florida-based training program has saved over $17,000 in personnel training costs as opposed to sending these participants out of state. Some self-reported impacts of this program include improved state agency networking, enhanced abilities of personnel to care for and improve the condition of seized livestock in neglect cases, and continual use and referral to course materials while on the job.

**Evaluation**: Aside from the end of course certification examination, overall knowledge gain is identified through a pre and posttest. Daily quizzes are administered to achieve shorter-term knowledge gain. Follow up surveys are sent to past participants to gauge the usefulness of the program to their daily jobs. The program committee takes feedback from each year and works to apply it for the following program. Since inception we have; added more in field demonstrations, provided more detailed examples for cattle body condition both in the classroom and on the farm, and worked to add a second LECALE class in a year if there is the demand, to meet immediate training needs of these agencies.