



# Chicken Farmers of Canada

Standing Committee on Agriculture and Agri-Food



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Chicken Farmers of Canada | 50 O'Connor Street, Suite 1610 | Ottawa, ON K1P 6L2 | 613-241-2800



## **Chicken Farmers of Canada Submission to AGRI on Bill C-205**

Chicken Farmers of Canada (CFC) appreciates the opportunity to provide input to the House Standing Committee on Agriculture and Agri-Food on the proposed regulations amending the Health of Animals Regulations. Bill C-205, *An Act to amend the Health of Animals Act*, as introduced by Foothills MP John Barlow, seeks to make it an offence to enter, without lawful authority or excuse, a place in which animals are kept if doing so could result in the exposure of the animals to a disease or toxic substance.

For several years now, farmers have been terrorized with the possibility of activists trespassing on their properties, and into their chicken barns, with a goal of refuting farmers' commitment to raising safe chicken, with the highest standards of care. This trespassing could result in tragic and unnecessary outcomes, including accidents, injury, and disease incursions.

We appreciate that the aims of Bill C-205 are twofold for our sector: it aims to protect the farmers and the animals in their care from activist threats, while maintaining disease prevention and biosecurity on the farm.

Ensuring the appropriate care and welfare of the birds raised by Canadian chicken farmers is our top priority. We take pride in our long-standing, progressive and innovative approach to animal care as demonstrated by our third-party audited, and mandatory, *Raised by a Canadian Farmer* Animal Care Program that safeguards our flocks. The Animal Care Program for Canadian chicken has a solid, credible, and science-based foundation. It is based on the Code of Practice developed through the National Farm Animal Care Council (NFACC). NFACC is a world leader in bringing together stakeholders with different perspectives – farmers, scientists, veterinarians, processors, retail associations, restaurant associations, transporters, animal welfare associations, and provincial/federal governments – to develop robust and sound Codes of Practice.



CFC's Animal Care Program is not static; it has been evolving since it was created in 2009. The elements that make this a highly credible program include:

- Our program uses one national standard to ensure consistency of requirements and record-keeping for all chicken farmers in Canada
- Our program includes annual farm audits
- Our program is mandatory
- Our program uses enforcement mechanisms in cases of non-compliance
- Our program offers the additional assurance of being 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> party audited
- Our program has credible foundations in that it is designed based on the Code of Practice for the Care and Handling of Hatching Eggs, Breeders, Chickens and Turkeys, as developed by the National Farm Animal Care Council

Chicken Farmers of Canada also has a Federal/Provincial/Territorial (FPT)-recognized *Raised by a Canadian Farmer* On-Farm Food Safety Program (OFFSP) which guarantees that the highest standards of biosecurity and disease prevention are in place on the farm. Chicken Farmers of Canada was the first national organization to achieve full recognition from government in 2013, and 100% of our farmers coast to coast are certified and compliant. Our On-Farm Food Safety Program employs strict measures on the farm to prevent flock infections from outside sources, including top-notch requirements for biosecurity, disease prevention, feed and water management and testing, and mandatory record keeping to prove that farmers are adhering to the process. Simple acts like registering visitors to the farm, wearing designated or new coveralls and booties inside the barn, and stringent flock reports are some of the many steps to guaranteeing safe chicken for Canadians.

These programs, coupled with the trust Canadians have in farmers, are some of the many reasons why chicken is Canada's number one meat protein. Farmers and the entire value chain work hard every day to ensure the food they are delivering for Canadians is safe and raised with care. The difference between the two programs is their assurance programs. OFFSP has an FPT recognition protocol, whereas the Animal Care Program does not. It relies on the assurance of the Animal Care



Assessment Framework—a nationally coordinated process for developing animal care assessment programs based on the Codes of Practice. In the next agriculture policy framework, the development of an FPT recognition protocol for animal care programs would help government convey the proper message to consumers about how their food is being raised and strengthen consumer trust in farmer messages over activist rhetoric.

Farmers are businesspeople – they implement procedures and protocols, mitigate and manage risk, and work hard to provide a high-quality product for Canadians. As part of their business practices, farmers already have good security policies and procedures in place to ensure overall security against any threat or multiple risks. Farmers are encouraged to install “no trespassing” signage around the property, making it clear not only to uninvited individuals that they are trespassing, but also help give greater legal recourse in the event of a trespass. Unfortunately, in recent examples, this signage, and often law enforcement intervention, don’t go far enough.

An individual entering a farm or private property that raises animals without permission may not respect the biosecurity requirements on Canadian chicken farms, which are critical to the prevention of disease in flocks. In the absence of tracking visitors or knowing who is on the property, it could also introduce a domestic, reportable, or emerging disease to the farm. An invasion rattles the farmer's sense of security and privacy and creates deep concerns about biosecurity and what seems like an ongoing attack on their livelihoods. Imagine if this behaviour was accepted at other types of businesses, or even at someone’s home?

Should a trespasser expose the animals to an unknown substance or disease, or to an element that may compromise food safety, this may impact the farmer’s ability to market the entire flock. This is not only a human and animal health concern but also an animal welfare concern as delays in the shipping the flocks to be processed can affect the density of the barn and strain the capacity limits. The premise of MP Barlow’s bill is to help farmers strengthen that security, to ensure the animals inside remain safe and healthy. This bill draws attention to the grave nature of trespassing on farms, and the severe punishments that should ensue due to the harmful neglect of private property.



Canadians have the right to protest and peacefully demonstrate in a public space. However, once these actions breach private property, protests or demonstrations should be illegal and punishable because they threaten the health and well-being of farm animals, producers, or other involved stakeholders. Canadians also have the right to choose. We can appreciate that some Canadian consumers may choose a vegetarian or vegan diet for a wide variety of reasons. However, time after time, these trespassers on farms have been organized by groups with an animal rights focus whose objectives are ultimately to eliminate animal agriculture, often sharing images that have either been altered, or on the contrary, have been confirmed by veterinarians and other subject matter experts that nothing nefarious has happened. This blatant attempt at fearmongering, coupled with illegal trespassing should not be an acceptable practice in Canada.

Canada's 2,877 chicken farmers would like to extend our sincerest gratitude to MP Barlow for raising this important topic in Parliament. We would also like to thank the Standing Committee on Agriculture and Agri-Food for its consideration of Bill C-205, and we hope you will support this important defence of chicken farmers and their on-farm practices that protect our food system. Farmers feed Canadians and it is up to all of us to ensure they can do so in the safest environments.