

Brief to the HoC Standing Committee on Agriculture and Agri-Food on its Study of Bill C-205

I am firmly opposed to the proposed Bill C-205. I feel this Bill is a guise to prevent the public from seeing what happens behind closed barn doors.

This means those farmers that have poor infection control and unsanitary/unsafe conditions are not held to account. This can negatively impact the food supply system, since disease is known to spread from farm to farm, such as was the case with PED (Porcine Epidemic Diarrhea) outbreak. (Ref 1)
It also means that it will be impossible to document unethical behavior of any farm worker. This can affect food quality and safety, public confidence in the food system, and of course, the animal welfare which the public has high expectations of.

Recommendation 1: That this committee recommend to The House of Commons that it withdraw Bill C-205

As a member of the public, I really appreciate it when the media covers stories about farm practices, particularly those that are concerning to the public. I recall in the last ten years, there have been a number of these, and they all relied on undercover video from what I can recall. For example, there was a farm in Chilliwack, BC, where workers were hitting birds with shovels and were advised to kick turkeys. (Ref 2)

Researchers should be able to access farms, as should activists. In many parts of the world, the public has a different expectation of privacy, including “The Right to Roam”, which allows people to walk on privately owned farmland. (Ref 3). Keeping this in mind, nobody wants someone snooping around their house or garage, and there can be real and perceived concern over people entering one's barn/s. A barn, however, should not have the same expectation of privacy as a house. In Toronto, 16,000 restaurants are subject to unannounced inspections per year. (Ref 3). Likewise, barns are food production facilities; they are businesses, and they should be inspected regularly given media exposes we have seen. Until the government conducts food safety and animal welfare inspections, these gaps will be (poorly) filled by whistleblowing employees, researchers and activists.

Recommendation 2: That the committee recommend to The House of Commons to mandate the CFIA to conduct regular workplace, unannounced inspections for both food safety and animal welfare.

When it comes to biosecurity, the whole world now understands that we all have 'skin in the game'. Nobody wants to shut down the global economy, cause our food supply to be unsafe, or to cause the needless deaths of food animals, as we saw with the e.coli crisis in Alberta in 2012 (Ref 4). Penalties for farmer caused outbreaks should be no less than those caused by trespassers. (My understanding is that there has never been a major (or perhaps any) outbreak caused by trespassers.

Recommendation 3: The penalty for trespass should be only equal to the damage caused by any infectious agent or contaminated agent intentionally or inadvertently brought to the farm, and the farm owner should be equally penalized for the costs associated with any outbreak caused by their failure to maintain safe and hygienic standards.

In other words, the trespasser should not be fined or jailed unless a disease causing agent is brought to the farm from the trespasser, and this should be covered under trespass legislation.

Recommendation 4: Recommend to the House of Commons that they instruct the CFIA to: develop and enforce mandatory biosecurity regulations for farmers, and that the House address intense confinement of animals which enable disease to spread amongst themselves and even to humans (such as with live and culled mink farms and COVID-19). (Ref 5)

Thank you for your attention to my opinions.

References

Ref 1 <http://www.omafra.gov.on.ca/english/food/inspection/ahw/PED-advisory.html> Accessed June 2, 2021

Ref 2 <https://www.policyalternatives.ca/publications/monitor/us-style-ag-gag-laws-come-canada>, Accessed June 2, 2021

Ref 3. <https://www.toronto.ca/legdocs/mmis/2009/hl/bgrd/backgroundfile-20470.pdf> (Page 7), Accessed June 2, 2021

Ref. 4. <https://www.ctvnews.ca/canada/xl-foods-dumps-1-million-pounds-of-beef-in-landfill-1.1004845> Accessed June 2, 2021

Ref. 5 <https://www.forbes.com/sites/roberthart/2021/05/13/denmark-begins-exhuming-millions-of-mink-killed-to-contain-covid/?sh=2db4594c6461> Accessed June 2, 2021