

I first became familiar with the family of the leader of a provincial political party when their dog was brought to a veterinary clinic where I worked. But Lane was not presented as "the family dog." Lane was introduced as, "My brother."

I'm sure it's safe to say that most on the federal Agri Committee also have companion animals who they view as family members. Some may call them their "fur babies", equating their importance in their lives to that of children. I call the other animals my cousins. They may be viewed as fellow earthlings or, in the words of philosopher Jeremy Bentham, as other nations. It was he who famously posed, "The question is not *Can they reason?* nor *Can they talk?* but *Can they suffer?*" So why is it those who commodify and exploit them get to call the shots when it comes to how much of that suffering is "acceptable?"

Canada has the shameful reputation of having some of the poorest animal transportation and "protection" laws in the developed world. Agricultural use is but one on an exhaustive list of so-called "accepted activities" that are exempt as long as "codes of practice" are followed. It has to be, because this industry could not exist if held to the same standard of care legally required of those with companion animals. We are told our laws are based on science and not emotion. So why is it that only those animals who we are emotionally attached to, those lucky enough to be deemed "pets," are given a modicum of protection when science informs us that all are equally capable of suffering?

June of last year I started writing monthly to both the provincial and federal departments of agriculture wanting to know how many animals were victims of "depopulation" due to the pandemic and by which means they were killed. In October I finally received a reply from the Province of Manitoba indicating, "Humane (sic) euthanasia procedures on these farms are not managed or directed by our department." I have yet to receive a reply from the feds. Odd that a government who purports to "take the matter of animal welfare very seriously" in any correspondence I do receive either can't or won't supply that information.

Maple Leaf Foods suspended all interaction with me when I asked for video proof that the CO2 gas chambers used in their slaughter house are as "humane" as they claim them to be. This before I could ask if they release the carbon dioxide into the atmosphere. Could you imagine if the response to the horrific conditions in some long-term care homes was to criminalize those who exposed it? Bill C-205 is the equivalent for farmed animals who deserve more oversight and protection, not less.

Having worked in veterinary clinics for 35 years, I attended many deaths. For the most part these were elderly patients who had lived full lives with a loving family. By far the most beautiful euthanasias were performed at clients' homes, often in a favourite setting such as outside in a garden. My role was to gently restrain the patient during the administration of IV medication so their last experience on this earth was to see and hear their guardians bidding them good-bye. I have seen people pay hundreds for what is essentially the injection of a few dollars' worth of drugs. Why? They wanted to ensure their beloved family member's death was as peaceful as possible.

Compare that to what happens to hundreds of millions of farmed animals in this country every year. In the egg industry, male chicks are killed immediately after hatching by gassing, suffocation or being ground up alive in a macerator. Baby pigs are "euthanized" by swinging them by their hind legs and smashing their heads onto concrete. How can this be legal, you ask? Amazingly, euthanasia is another so-called "accepted activity" making it a most obscene oxymoron. A former Manitoba hog barn worker described how a sow was killed by hanging. Because of her thick, muscular neck it took 5 minutes before she finally strangled to death.

Animals are crowded into trailers in extremes of weather ranging from frigid cold to blistering heat with no food, water or rest to be transported to a slaughter house. A house of slaughter. According to

CFIA statistics over 1.5 million suffer to death in transit. There are those who will survive the initial shackling, stunning and throat slitting and enter a scalding tank still alive. Their last experience on this earth, after a life not worth living, is to be scalded to death. And throughout their existence, the only time a few lucky ones may encounter human kindness will be through the ventilation holes of a trailer as activists show them some compassion or quench their thirst with water. And Bill C-205 wants to criminalize that?

If we are so concerned about zoonoses, pandemics and biosecurity, why will throngs of children be allowed to interact with the residents of Aunt Sally's Farm at Winnipeg's Assiniboine Park Zoo? Why are sheep, goats, calves and cattle from differing origins all paraded through the same auction ring with no disinfection in between? Why have we not shut down mink farms where Covid has proven to be bi-directional, jumping from humans to minks and back to humans again with the potential to merrily mutate along the way? Why are the corpses of victims of "depopulation" dumped at Winnipeg's Brady Landfill like so much garbage? Why do we continue the live export of millions of animals to 55 countries, including horses to Japan for slaughter to become a delicacy? Why are we not cracking down on the trade in wildlife?

And why are we not phasing out factory farming that has already given rise to, for example, swine flu in 2009 and avian flu in 2013 – no activists required? Factory farms check off all the boxes for conditions that could produce the next pandemic. Hundreds, if not thousands, of genetically similar animals are crammed into windowless warehouses, their lungs compromised by inhaling ammonia from their own waste. Vectors of disease such as flies and rodents can move in and out of buildings making claims regarding biosecurity a moot point. And what about farmers and workers who breach biosecurity protocol? Seventy-eight percent of antibiotics used in Canada are given to farmed animals leading to the evolution of super-bugs.

The idea the other animals and the environment are here "for" us and not "with" us is how we arrived at the dark place we find ourselves today. Besides being responsible for suffering on a scale never before witnessed on this planet, animal agriculture is one of the main drivers behind the climate catastrophe and biodiversity loss. The consumption of animal products is linked to many of our chronic diseases, some of which are co-morbidities associated with Covid deaths.

It is time we aligned our subsidies with Canada's Food Guide, a document produced by 37 scientists over 3 years with no industry influence. The billions of dollars given to animal agriculture could be used to help transition farmers to compassionate, sustainable and healthy plant-based systems. Until that end is achieved we must bring our laws into the 21st Century, mandate the use of climate controlled transport trucks and install CCTV cameras in all facilities where animals are raised, transported and slaughtered so there is no doubt as to what conditions they must endure. Because what is truly a nightmare for this industry is not the possibility of animals being exposed to pathogens inadvertently introduced by activists, but the prospect of the suffering, both inherent and egregious, being exposed to public scrutiny.