



Ontario Federation of Agriculture

Ontario AgriCentre

100 Stone Road West, Suite 206, Guelph, Ontario N1G 5L3

Tel: (519) 821-8883 ☎ Fax: (519) 821-8810 ☎ www.ofa.on.ca

January 29, 2012

Hon. Madeleine Meilleur
Minister of Community Safety and Correctional Services
George Drew Bldg
18th Floor, 25 Grosvenor Street
Toronto, ON M7A 1Y6

Dear Minister Meilleur:

The Ontario Federation of Agriculture (OFA) appreciates the time you and your staff took to meet with us last week to discuss concerns with the Ontario Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Act (OSPCA Act). Farmers and farm organizations endorse the humane treatment of all animals. Farmers who raise livestock or poultry treat them with care and consideration – it is their livelihood and in their best interests to do so. They also genuinely care about the well being of their animals.

However, as we discussed, the current model and execution of the OSPCA Act is flawed and can be improved to function more effectively for the well being of farm animals.

It is important to promote a much higher degree of collaboration across farm organizations and with Farm and Food Care Ontario (FFCO) to ensure farmers are well aware of the accepted Codes of Practice for farm animal care. In so doing, we believe a reduction in incident frequency and severity can be reduced and, in cases where animal welfare is a problem, remedial action can be pursued to resolve the issue.

The various nationally-developed Codes of Practice for farm animals are developed in concert with specialists in animal welfare and provide an acceptable reference standard. Currently there are 13 codes for specific farm animal types, plus one addressing transport. A number of the Codes are currently under revision.

At issue are the inspection of farms and the subsequent enforcement of the accepted standards.

Generally, the Ontario Federation of Agriculture believes that amendments to the Act are needed to;

- Make the OSPCA accountable to the Legislative Assembly and/or the Minister of Community Safety and Correctional Services through mandatory annual reporting of SPCA activities; investigations, enforcement activities, case outcomes, appeals and the training and qualifications of enforcement staff.
- Repeal the provisions pertaining to entry without a warrant [section 12(6)].
- Clarify the application of the term “immediate distress”, which relates to entry without a warrant [section 12(8)].

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- Separate OSPCA's dual and often conflicting roles, those being; enforcer of provincial and federal animal protection laws and registered charity that actively raises funds.
- Expand the makeup of the Animal Care Review Board (ACRB) to include veterinarians with expertise in all types of farm animals, cattle, horses, sheep, goats, swine and poultry. Currently there is one large animal veterinarian available for Board hearings. In addition, the ACRB should include farmer and farm organization representation.

More specifically, we believe the OSPCA can continue to conduct inspection of farms to investigate animal welfare concerns. The inspection activities would be governed by the above noted concerns with entry and distress.

With this in mind we believe the accountability notion can be properly addressed by removing OSPCA from on-farm enforcement activities. Inspections would be conducted by OSPCA in conjunction with the respective commodity organization and/or a Farm and Food Care Ontario representative. This would enable education and awareness opportunities and remedial action as warranted.

If enforcement action is required we recommend that enforcement be conducted by specially trained officials from the Ontario Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs. We do not see this as a fiscally onerous task given the improved up-front investment of the farm community on awareness, education and remedial action.

Minister, as discussed, we believe that changes are warranted and required in the inspection and enforcement processes under the OSPCA Act. OFA has consulted with commodity organizations and believe we have set a course for an improved enforcement model – one that begins with education and awareness.

We appreciate the time you took to discuss these important considerations and look forward to working with you on positive change in the very near future.

Sincerely,



Mark Wales,
President