

March 11, 2025

Ministry of the Solicitor General
Public Safety Division
Animal Welfare Services
25 Grosvenor St.
12th Floor
Toronto ON M7A 1Y6

Submitted via Ontario's Regulatory Registry

To Whom It May Concern:

Re: 25-SOLGEN002: Shelter Standards for Service Providers Housing Animals in the Care of Animal Welfare Services

The Ontario Federation of Agriculture (OFA) appreciates the opportunity to provide input on the consultation on 25-SOLGEN002: Shelter Standards for Service Providers Housing Animals in the Care of Animal Services. Our topline feedback is summarized below:

- **Comprehensive Standards:** OFA appreciates the comprehensive nature of the Shelter Standards, and the inclusion of biosecurity measures, proper facilities, and the recognition of NFACC Codes of Practice and CFIA requirements.
- **Specialized Care and Training:** OFA believes the Shelter Standards highlight the specialized care required for commercial farm animals and horses.
- **Five Domains Model:** OFA is concerned that using the Five Domains Model of animal welfare allows for the subjective assessment of mental health of an animal or a group of animals and creates undue burden for shelter providers.
- **Definition of Commercial Animals/Livestock:** OFA believes the Shelter Standards emphasize the need to distinguish commercial animals/livestock from companion animals in legislation or regulation to ensure appropriate policies, care, and cost management.
- **Costs of Care:** OFA is concerned that the Shelter Standards impose costly and burdensome requirements on shelters, leading to excessive fees that often surpass the commercial value of seized livestock and horses.
- **Seizure as a Last Resort:** OFA asserts that animal seizure should be a last resort, prioritizing alternative compliance measures.
- **Adoption and Fostering of Equines:** OFA believes shelters should not be responsible for long-term equine rehoming, as adoption and fostering processes are complex, resource-intensive, and beyond their primary mandate and scope of temporary care providers.

The OFA is the largest general farm organization in Ontario, proudly representing more than 38,000 farm family members. OFA has a strong voice for our members and the agri-food industry on issues, legislation and regulations administered by all levels of government. We are dedicated

to ensuring that the agri-food sector and rural communities are considered and consulted with for any new or changing legislation that would impact the sustainability and growth of our farm businesses.

OFA appreciates this opportunity to provide input on the consultation on **25-SOLGEN002: Shelter Standards for Service Providers Housing Animals in the Care of Animal Welfare Services**. Our comments will be specifically focused on the Animal Welfare Services (AWS) Shelter Standards for Equine and Farm Animals. The humane care of all animals, including farmed livestock, poultry and horses, is of high priority for OFA. Dedicated to the health, safety, and overall well-being of their animals, Ontario's farmers and agricultural organizations prioritize responsible animal husbandry and care to ensure the welfare of livestock, poultry and horses across the province.

OFA appreciates the thoroughness of the Shelter Standards, which encompass a wide range of critical areas for housing equine and farm animals in a manner that protects their welfare while maintaining compliance with the *Provincial Animal Welfare Services Act, 2020*. The comprehensive Shelter Standards for animal care include facility management, housing and care, biosecurity and disease control, euthanasia, emergency management, handling, and record keeping. OFA commends the Shelter Standards for placing a high priority on biosecurity measures, recognizing their critical role in protecting animal health. The consideration of vulnerable and high-risk animals, establishment of isolation areas, and proper sanitation enhance animal welfare, and align with industry best practices.

Including requirements for proper facilities, such as species-appropriate handling facilities, is a positive aspect of the Shelter Standards, as is the acknowledgement of the National Farm Animal Care Council (NFACC) Codes of Practice, and the Canadian Food Inspection Agency (CFIA) Humane Transport Regulations.

While OFA acknowledges the importance of having comprehensive protocols to ensure the proper care of animals in shelters, we believe these Shelter Standards highlight the detailed and specialized nature of handling and caring for commercial animals and horses and further emphasize the impracticality of housing farmed animals and horses in such facilities.

OFA is concerned with the application of the Five Domains Model of Animal Welfare in the Shelter Standards to "promote positive welfare outcomes" for animals in the ministry's care; Its use raises concerns about farmed animals being kept in care for the subjectively assessed mental health of an animal or herd of animals. The model includes a subjective evaluation of an animal's mental state, which can be difficult to measure consistently and objectively, given the lack of standardized, practical guidelines to assess "mental health". OFA questions why shelters must bear the burden of providing for the mental health of individual and groups of animals, given that the regulations under the PAWS Act does not include this requirement for the basic standards of care for all animals. Applying such a model requires extensive observation, specialized training, and additional resources, which may be financially and logistically challenging for shelter providers. The model's focus on individual mental well-being is difficult to apply to livestock especially in groups, and its use in shelter settings could increase costs, prolong shelter stays, and create regulatory burdens that may not ultimately serve the best interests of the animals, AWS, or the industry.

OFA believes that the Shelter Standard underscores the necessity to differentiate between commercial livestock and horses from domestic pets and wildlife in the legislation or corresponding regulations. Legislation from other jurisdictions distinguish between commercial and companion animals; this allows for tailored decision-making, policies, and procedures specific to commercial animals, large animals in particular, in the instance of distress, care and disposal methods in the event of seizure, and the correlated costs associated with care. OFA recommends delineating commercial animals from companion animals in the legislation or regulation to provide for the realities of removal and housing of farmed animals and decrease the need for and burdens associated with shelter facilities.

The Shelter Standards require shelters to provide individual animal intake assessments, daily examination and care logs, security system implementations, and meticulous documentation. OFA is concerned that these onerous requirements will contribute to higher costs associated with sheltering livestock and horses in the event of seizure. Previous AWS welfare cases have shown fees associated with housing and caring for seized livestock and horses have exceeded industry standards and have generally exceeded the commercial value of the seized animals. Such stringent requirements for shelters raise concerns about the onerous and costly nature of the Shelter Standards; OFA is apprehensive that the requirements contained therein will further escalate the financial burden on producers when livestock and horses are removed from their care., and the potential for shelter facility operators to gain financial benefit from seized animals.

OFA would like to reiterate that livestock farming is a commercial endeavour. Farm animals have very different disposal methods unavailable to domestic animals, such as commodity markets. Voluntary options to dispose of animals through traditional means should be available to producers, instead of removing animals when warranted to avoid costs associated with the care and housing of seized livestock.

OFA maintains that the seizure and removal of animals by AWS should be a measure of last resort, used only when an animal is in critical distress, or when alternative compliance approaches have been exhausted. In cases of non-compliance with orders, priority should be given to alternative, progressive enforcement measures rather than immediate removal. Alternative measures encourage compliance while avoiding significant costs and resource demands associated with housing and caring for farm animals for extended periods of time. OFA believes a balanced, risk-based approach, focusing on corrective measures before removal, would better serve both animal welfare and responsible livestock management while reducing unnecessary government, producer and industry costs.

OFA is concerned about the Shelter Standard related to the adoption and fostering of equines outlined in the document. The expectations that shelters must screen, select, and ensure the long-term suitability of adoption and foster places is unrealistic, and places an undue burden on these facilities. Shelters should be primarily used to provide temporary housing and care for seized animals in distress, not to act as long-term placement agencies. The process of identifying, vetting, and monitoring potential adopters and foster homes is complex, resource-intensive, and time-consuming, requiring specialized expertise beyond the core function of animal shelters. Moreover, the liability and risks associated with improper placements—such as inadequate care, neglect, or the animal being returned to the shelter—add significant operational challenges. The responsibility for equine rehoming should rest with industry experts, breed-specific rescues, or organizations with the capacity and networks to facilitate appropriate placements, rather than

burdening shelters with additional obligations that detract from their primary mandate of providing immediate animal care and welfare.

OFA appreciates the effort to establish comprehensive Shelter Standards that promote animal welfare and ensure appropriate care for animals requiring housing in shelters. However, these standards highlight the specialized nature of livestock and equine care, reinforcing the need for practical and tailored approaches that acknowledge the unique nature and challenges of caring for commercial farm animals and horses. While there are positive aspects to the Shelter Standards, OFA believes there is room for improvement to ensure they are feasible, cost-effective, and aligned with the realities of the agriculture and equine industry.

OFA appreciates the opportunity to provide our feedback and perspectives on 25-SOLGEN002: Shelter Standards for Service Providers Housing Animals in the Care of Animal Welfare Services: Animal Welfare Services Shelter Standards for Equine and Farm Animals. We are committed to continuing our work together with AWS and other stakeholders to ensure the PAWS Act and its regulations continue to serve the best interests of livestock, poultry and equines in Ontario.

Sincerely,



Drew Spoelstra
President

cc: OFA Board of Directors

This submission has been approved by OFA's Board of Directors and will be posted to OFA's website: <https://ofa.on.ca/resources>.