

## OPINION

## SOW STALLS

# Time to end sow stalls, now

Pregnant pigs should have 'loose housing' instead of sow stalls, so a sow can move around and interact with other pregnant sows, have straw to lie on.



BY STEPHANIE BROWN

TORONTO—A recent announcement by the Retail Council of Canada (RCC) has set the stage for real change for farm animals in Canada—especially in light of weak government leadership.

The announcement, that eight major Canadian grocers—Loblaws, Costco Canada, Metro, Sobeys, Walmart Canada, Co-op Canada, Federated Co-ops, and Canada Safeway—will phase out sow stalls from their supply chains by 2022 is welcome news indeed for Canada's one-million plus female breeding pigs.

Currently, the majority of these pigs suffer intensive confinement almost their entire lives in sow stalls—also known as gestation crates: concrete, steel cages so

narrow the pregnant pigs cannot even turn around.

"Intensive confinement," as sow stalls demonstrate, refers to animals kept in the smallest space, for the shortest time, with the least amount of feed. It's a deprived life for a feeling creature, yet the norm not only for sows, but a majority of the 700 million land animals killed for food annually in Canada.

The commitment by RCC and its grocer members is a credit to consumers—not government initiatives—who put pressure on retailers like Tim Hortons and Loblaws for change. And after all, we're all consumers. Two large pig corporations, Maple Leaf and Olymel, have also made corporate decisions to end sow stall use by 2017 and 2022, respectively. They see a marketplace with changing expectations.

While these commitments represent a significant collective step forward in Canadian agriculture, they are not unique. The European Union banned sow stalls some years ago,

and the ban took effect this year. New Zealand and Australia, important trading partners for Canada, are ending sow stalls in 2015 and 2017. Seven U.S. states have legislated phase-outs as well.

So why the lack of leadership here in farm animal welfare? Ottawa responds quickly when animal products cannot be exported for any reason—for example, because producers continue to use drugs such as ractopamine, banned elsewhere for food safety reasons, including China and Russia. Hormone implants to increase growth in Canadian cattle are another exclusionary issue. Intensive confinement housing may become a trade barrier in future.

Canadian government policy has been behind the eight-ball on other farm animal matters too. The Canadian Medical Association recently called for an end to some antibiotics widely used in farm animals. One has to wonder why Ottawa doesn't take leadership on such a serious human and animal health issue when impor-

tant antibiotics may no longer work due to resistance. A Canadian producer may legally order a barrel of antibiotics from China on the internet and administer them indiscriminately to factory-farmed animals.

On a positive note, the federal government has contributed funding to Alberta-based National Farm Animal Care Council (NFACC), an agency representing varied stakeholders in animal agriculture. NFACC is charged with updating husbandry codes of practice for farmed animals. The codes are mostly voluntary and represent minimum animal welfare production standards.

The code revision process, like many issues, is politically charged. For example, the limited membership from the animal protection movement on code committees is restricted to one organization. Others need not apply.

Moreover, despite diverse committee membership, the codes remain industry-driven. Numbers count when difficult decisions are made. Admittedly, NFACC walks a fine line to placate industry (*the majority*) that often opposes change, and animal welfarists (*the minority*) who seek an end to cruel confinement practices.

In other spheres affecting farmed animals, regulations governing animal transport under the *Health of Animals Act* are 33 years old and grossly outdated. Despite claims of imminent revision, the regulations still permit cattle, sheep and goats to be legally transported 52 hours across Canada with no water, food or rest. Poultry, pigs and horses may be transported 36 hours with no water, food or rest.

These are the worst transport standards in the western world. Why the delay in updating regulations that affect virtually all farmed animals at some point in their lives?

A concrete, personal solution to these issues is to not eat meat. For the 700 million land animals killed for food annually in Canada, the least we must do is not subject them to intensive confinement or force them to travel more than two days and nights without water. We can do better. And as initiatives such as the RCC's clearly show, now's the time to do it.

The long-awaited pig code was released June 1, and calls for an end to sow stalls by July 1, 2024.

Stephanie Brown is a co-founder and a director of the Canadian Coalition for Farm Animals, based in Toronto. The CCFA is dedicated to promoting the welfare of animals raised for food in Canada through public education, legislative change and consumer choice.

## OPINION

## JOBS &amp; ECONOMY

# Decent jobs, greater equity should not come at expense of productivity, economic growth

Rather, done the right way, it can contribute to both. A commitment to a fair and decent society should surely be a goal shared by all Canadians. Today, though, it seems to be not a national priority.



BY DAVID CRANE

TORONTO—There are two views on jobs and the economy.

One is that Canada weathered the financial crisis better than any other G7 country, and that we have more jobs today than before the financial crisis. In other words, we are doing reasonably well.

The other view is that while we have more jobs than before the crisis, the quality of jobs has declined, pay and benefits have fallen for many workers, close to 1 million workers are stuck in part-time jobs because they cannot find full-time jobs and young Canadians are facing tough times in finding decent entry-level jobs that will set them on a trajectory for promising careers.

Both views are true. But the first one leads to complacency and inaction in pursuing decent jobs for all, while the one that should really concern us is what is happening to

the quality of jobs and the impact this is having on the living standards of many ordinary Canadians.

Between April 2007, before the financial crisis hit, and April 2013, Canada lost nearly 320,000 manufacturing jobs and the number of people working in part-time jobs rather than the full-time jobs they wanted totalled 924,400, or 256,200 more than in April 2007. This does not fully account for all those Canadians working in temporary, contract jobs. What we do know is that too many Canadians are leading insecure lives, unable to build a real stake in society, or look forward to adequate pensions and other benefits.

Much of the job growth since 2007—an increase of 128,000 jobs in education, 354,000 in health and social services and 139,000 in public administration—has occurred in the public sector or in high-end occupations in professional, scientific and technical services (up by 254,000 jobs).

But for Canadians in middle-level jobs, or lower, the news has not been good. In its latest World of Work report, the International Labour Organization calculates the share of

the middle-income group (defined as those earning between 70 and 150 per cent of median income as a share of the total population) at the beginning of the 1990s and 2009.

For Canada, it found that the share of middle-income Canadians had declined from just over 50 per cent of the total population at the start of the 1990s to a bit over 45 per cent in 2009.

There has certainly been a downward pressure on wages for many workers, though not top executives in major corporations who may earn more in a day than some workers will earn in a year.

In contract agreements with the Detroit Three auto companies last September, for example, the Canadian Auto Workers had to agree to a 17 per cent pay cut for starting workers compared to their previous contract and to a slower path to the top rate, from six years before to 10 years in the new contract, as well as other cutbacks in pensions and other benefits.

In Ontario, workers at the very bottom of the pay scale, those earning just the minimum wage, have had their pay frozen since 2010 by the Liberal government, and

Ontario's recent budget extends that freeze further. This will make inequality worse and keep too many families close to the poverty line; there surely is no justification for such harsh treatment of Ontario's lowest-paid workers.

There are various explanations as to why there is what the ILO calls a "hollowing out" of middle income families. One explanation is that there has been significant job polarization with an increase in jobs at the top and the bottom, the highest- and the lowest-skilled, and a shrinking of the middle. The other explanation, the ILO says, is that advanced countries have been loosening employment protection, including weakening the ability of unions to fight for benefits for workers, and reducing the progressivity of the tax system.

Public policy matters since income distribution and job creation resulting from the impacts of globalization and technological change can be affected by labour market legislation and fiscal, tax, trade and education policies, the ILO says.

Canada has done some of the things the ILO urges, such as increas-

ing the incentive for businesses to invest in technology by allowing a fast write-off of such investments, which makes them cheaper.

Canada has also expanded its support for innovative small and mid-size companies by doubling the budget for the Industrial Research Assistance Program, which provides grants for companies adopting or developing new products or processes. And the federal program to restructure Southern Ontario, FedDev, was renewed in the recent federal budget.

While these efforts are delivering results, too many corporations are still sitting on record-level cash reserves, using the money for dividends, share-buybacks and bonuses for top executives, rather than investing for future growth and the jobs that go with growth.

But the haste to balance the federal budget works against employment prospects. For example, there are significant infrastructure needs across the country that should be met. But the federal government has adopted a go-slow approach for the next several years because balancing the budget is a higher priority.

Likewise, federal support for worker training and retraining is in doubt since Ottawa proposes major changes that put all the responsibility for additional funding on the provinces and business, in what could be a protracted negotiation.

One of our goals as a society should be to pursue decent jobs and greater equity. Contrary to the views held by some, this does not come at the expense of productivity or economic growth. Rather, done the right way, it can contribute to both. A commitment to a fair and decent society should surely be a goal shared by all Canadians. Today, though, it seems to be not a national priority.

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