



May 4, 2020

Honourable Bill Morneau
Minister of Finance
90 Elgin St.
Ottawa, Ontario K1A 0G5

Honourable Marie-Claude Bibeau
Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food
1341 Baseline Road Tower 7, Floor 9, Room 149
Ottawa, Ontario K1A 0C5

Dear Ministers,

Re: Animal agriculture industry requests for financial aid

On behalf of Animal Justice, Mercy for Animals, and the Canadian Coalition for Farm Animals, we are writing in response to reports that the Canadian Pork Council is seeking approximately \$500 million dollars in public funds to compensate for lost revenues in the pig farming industry caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. The Canadian Cattlemen's Association is pushing for government programs aimed at helping the cow farming industry with the costs of feeding cows for longer periods of time and compensating producers for financial losses.

Canada faces unprecedented public health challenges due to the outbreak of COVID-19. The pandemic is also taking a significant economic toll on individual Canadians, businesses, and not-for-profit groups such as ours. In the animal agriculture industry, challenges due to the COVID-19 pandemic pose serious risks to animal welfare, including risks of staff layoffs and an inability to maintain animal care practices, confined living conditions that are even more overcrowded than they were previously, inadequate feed and veterinary supplies, animals being transported greater distances to slaughter, and animals being killed through what is known as "mass depopulation" or "culling".

Public funds should not be used to support factory farms, which are known for subjecting animals to cruelty, providing dangerous and precarious working conditions for labourers, damaging the natural environment, and causing outbreaks of foodborne illnesses and viral infections. We therefore request that any agricultural funding provided by the federal government be directed to rebuilding and growing local, safe, sustainable plant-based food systems that are more resilient and will improve food security, the health of Canadians, worker safety, and the environment on which we all depend. While we do not support any funding being provided to the pig farming industry or other animal agriculture sectors, should the

government decide to provide such funding, we ask that it prioritize the welfare of farmed animals and workers.

The COVID-19 pandemic's impacts on animals, workers, and independent farmers

The adverse economic impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on the agricultural sector are disproportionately being experienced by animals, workers, and independent farmers. Public funds should be focused on supporting these groups, rather than factory farms and the large multi-million dollar companies that presently dominate the animal agricultural industry.

Outbreaks of COVID-19 at slaughterhouses across the country have quickly disrupted supply chains. At least seven slaughterhouses have been shut down due to such outbreaks, with more expected to follow suit. The Cargill Inc. slaughterhouse near High River, Alta, now has the unenviable title of being the country's largest single site outbreak of COVID-19.

Other slaughterhouses have had to slow production in light of absenteeism and requirements for physical distancing protocols, which are particularly difficult to adhere to in the high-speed assembly line environment characteristic of most slaughterhouses and meat processing facilities. The grueling conditions faced by slaughterhouse workers – who typically come from marginalized communities and already face high risks of injury, illness, and mental distress due to the conditions of their work – have unsurprisingly led these facilities to become epicenters of the COVID-19 pandemic across North America.

Disruptions and closures at Canadian and US slaughterhouses have caused the financial value of baby pigs in Canada to plummet to almost nothing. Hundreds of pigs and piglets have already been killed on Canadian farms, with their bodies being buried, composted, or disposed of in landfills. Pregnant pigs are being given injections to cause the abortion of their fetuses. Reports suggest that there is a “backlog” of more than 92,000 pigs in Quebec alone due to slaughterhouse closures from COVID-19, and that these pigs will likely be “disposed of” by farmers. Of course, these animals are not merely “backlog” that needs to be “cleared”. They are sentient beings whose welfare is in serious jeopardy.

Although Chicken Farmers of Canada is reducing the number of chickens raised for meat in order to reduce the risk of on-farm culling, there is a risk that any increase in operating disruptions at chicken slaughtering facilities or in the egg industry will lead to “mass depopulation” of chickens, similar to what is occurring in parts of the United States. Farmers with cows are similarly facing “backlogs” and lost revenues, and have begun calling for immediate federal aid, though they so far have not resorted to mass killing.

Part of the reason for the vulnerability of the meat, dairy, and egg industries' supply chain is because of the trend toward consolidation in recent decades, whereby a handful of multinational companies have replaced smaller operators. Hundreds of thousands of animals can be slaughtered each week at one slaughterhouse, so the closure of such a facility, even temporarily, has vast economic and animal welfare impacts across the supply chain.

There are no legally binding standards for the treatment of animals on farms in Canada. Even before the public sector was faced with the challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic, there were no proactive government inspections of farms to monitor animal welfare. Adding to the troublingly opaque nature of the industry is the recent trend in Alberta and Ontario toward adopting agricultural gag ("ag gag") laws, which make it an offence for employee whistleblowers to enter facilities in order to expose animal abuse and unlawful activities. This lack of transparency and oversight makes the prospect of culling animals on farms particularly troubling.

Through the National Farm Animal Care Council (NFACC), animal use industries have established their own non-binding Codes of Practice. According to these standards, "acceptable" methods to euthanize pigs depend on the weight of the animal and include blunt force trauma, electrocution, carbon dioxide inhalation, and penetrating or non-penetrating captive bolts. "Acceptable" methods for "mass depopulation" of chickens and turkeys include manual blunt force trauma; decapitation; inhalation of nitrogen, carbon dioxide, or carbon monoxide; and live maceration of chicks. As cruel as they are, these recommended methods do not even have legal force. There is significant concern that farmers will resort to using other disturbing methods currently being used in the United States, including smothering broiler chickens with foam, shutting off ventilation inside barns so that animals overheat and die, and live burials.

The welfare of animals living on factory farms across the country is already severely compromised. These animals now face the risk of even greater suffering because of supply chain disruptions and economic downturn. The evidence could not be clearer: we are in the midst of a national farmed animal welfare emergency.

Public funds should be used to promote sustainable food systems

The Canadian pig farming industry is asking the federal government for an immediate direct cash payment of \$20 per pig. This request would amount to approximately \$500 million in direct payments to producers. Among other conditions, the Canadian Pork Council has requested that funds not be tied to "inventory depopulation decisions."

The cow farming industry is also asking for assistance in the form of federal funds and programs. It is likely that other animal agriculture industries will ask for similar bailouts.

We request that the government ensure no relief funds are provided to industrial animal agriculture operations and corporate parents. Factory farms, also known as “Intensive Livestock Operations” (ILOs) or “Concentrated Animal Feeding Operations” (CAFOs), raise animals in cruel conditions characterized by confinement in battery cages, veal crates, and gestation crates, and cause a range of adverse environmental and public health impacts due to air and water pollution, significant greenhouse gas emissions, and the development of antibiotic resistance in bacteria. Factory farms increase risks of outbreaks of foodborne illnesses, and have already given rise to several deadly strains of avian or swine influenza. In fact, they have been identified by leading scientific experts as potential breeding grounds for future zoonotic diseases that may be similar to, or even more deadly than, COVID-19.

Funds should be provided to small and mid-sized producers, especially those who do not confine animals in cruel cages or crates, and to help farmers transition out of the factory farm model and into sustainable, plant-based agriculture. Funds should support farmers producing fruits, vegetables, pulses, whole grains, beans, nuts and seeds, and other climate-compatible plant-based foods, in line with Canada’s Food Guide.

We also request that Canada continue to uphold existing environmental and worker health laws during this pandemic. This pandemic must not be used as an excuse to allow factory farms and slaughterhouses to increase pollution and pesticide use, or to roll back worker protections necessary to prevent the spread of COVID-19.

Furthermore, the government should require that a CFIA inspector be present at all times when animals are slaughtered on farms.

Finally, it is important to note that other parts of the agricultural sector, which may lack the resources and lobbying expertise of the pig and cow farming industries, are also suffering during this pandemic. For instance, mushroom growers in Canada are reportedly losing up to \$400,000 per week due to lost revenues from restaurants. Potato farmers will need to store up to 200 million pounds of frozen potatoes, which are at risk of going to waste. Any federal funding to the agricultural sector should be allocated in an independent manner based on demonstrated financial need and the objective of transitioning Canada to a safe and sustainable food production system, not on the lobbying might of a given industry.

“Business as usual” is not working for animals, workers, the environment, or rural communities

As the government considers how best to use public funds to support the agricultural sector, it is fundamentally important that funds provided not be used to promote a continuation of “business as usual” for the industrial animal agricultural sector. That sector’s “normal” is not working for

animals, workers, rural economies, public health, or the Canadian environment. The COVID-19 pandemic has laid bare many of the problems with North American meat, dairy, and egg industries, which are now characterized by industrial practices and extreme consolidation into a few, large-scale companies rather than smaller, more diverse farm systems and regional food hubs.

A sustainable farming future requires public policy and investment that promotes climate-compatible plant-based foods, as well as farming practices that reflect consumers' increasing concern over the treatment of animals. Our social and economic recovery from the present crisis must adequately prepare us for future crises, by ensuring our food system is resilient, safe, healthy, sustainable, and humane.

Yours truly,

Animal Justice

Mercy for Animals

Canadian Coalition for Farm Animals

CC:  MP Alistair MacGregor, NDP Critic for Agriculture, Rural Economic Development
MP Peter Julian, NDP Critic for Finance
MP John Barlow, Conservative Critic for Agriculture and Agri-Food
Hon. Pierre Poilievre, Conservative Critic for Finance
Jo-Ann Roberts, Green Party of Canada Interim Leader