

Animals transported for slaughter deserve better

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PUBLISHED: Monday, Aug. 21, 2017 12:00 AM

OTTAWA—In the sweltering heat of summer, Canadians seek refuge in air-conditioned buildings, indulge in cool treats, and take extra care to stay hydrated. Meanwhile, millions of farm animals are transported across great distances in trucks that offer little to no protection from the elements. The animals are also denied water, food, and rest for up to three consecutive days.

The Canadian Food Inspection Agency, the government body responsible for determining and enforcing our national animal transport regulations, estimates that two to three million animals die during transport each year. Millions more suffer from illness or injury due to extreme weather exposure while in transit, experiencing dehydration and heat stress in the summer, or cold stress and frostbite in the winter.

This avoidable suffering results from two factors: first, the majority of Canada's large-scale factory farms are located in the Prairie provinces, while most slaughterhouses are in Ontario and Quebec. Animals therefore have to be transported thousands of kilometres to be slaughtered for food. Second, Canada has some of the [worst](#) animal-transport regulations—and animal

welfare legislation more generally—in the industrialized world. Though Agriculture Minister Lawrence MacAulay has promised to improve national animal transport regulations, he has so far stalled on the release of much-needed revisions.

Under current regulations, livestock can be crowded into transport trucks and packed together so densely that it is difficult for them to turn around, let alone lie down. Animals who are ill or injured can be transported as well, as long as they are not expected to experience “undue suffering.” Alarmingly, farm animals can be transported for 36 to 72 hours at a time, depending on their species, without the opportunity to eat, drink, or rest.

In comparison, the European Union does not allow livestock to be transported for more than eight to 14 hours at a time unless animals are provided with water, food, and bedding during their journey. In the United States, the maximum transport time for farm animals is 28 hours. Transport is known to be a highly stressful experience for animals given their sensitivity to new environments and confinement in close quarters with other animals, yet we subject them to hours of continuous distress in conditions so poor that some don't survive the journey.

Last December, the Ministry of Agriculture and Agri-Food finally released draft revisions to Canadian transport laws after a decade-long call from animal welfare advocates and concerned citizens. We initially rejoiced, relieved that the government finally made good on previously empty promises, until we reviewed the proposed changes. To say that the draft was disappointing is an understatement; if implemented, Canada's laws will continue to lag behind the rest of the developed world and our farm animals will continue to pay the price.

Although the public consultation period ended in February, the ministry has remained suspiciously silent on the status of the draft. Minister MacAulay appears to be stalling on the release of an updated amendment, no doubt struggling to balance appeasing the vocal and well-resourced animal agriculture industries on one hand, and representing the views of the vast majority of Canadians who care about animal welfare on the other. Canadians are becoming more aware of the mistreatment endured by farm animals raised for food, thanks in part to undercover investigations of factory

farms conducted by animal protection organizations. Recent polls suggest that consumers are increasingly concerned about making choices in line with their values: a [survey](#) released last month shows that nearly nine in 10 Canadians want food companies to reduce the suffering of chickens in their supply chains, even if it means that the cost of chicken meat increases.

As consumers begin to demand better welfare for farm animals, producers will have to adapt to stay in business. But the meat, poultry, egg, and dairy industries should not be allowed to self-regulate. It's time for Canada to finally establish better transport regulations that are consistent with international best practices—mandating the humane treatment of farm animals at every step in their unnaturally short lives, from farm, to slaughter, to table.

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