

Farmers feed families, even vegetarian ones!

by SHERALYN ROMAN

We were pleased to read of the recent announcement by MPP Ernie Hardeman, Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs, announcing new protections for Ontario's farmers, farm animals and food supply. After a particularly trying summer that saw activists trespassing on properties, causing hardship, anxiety and stress not only on the hardworking farmers of our province but also on the animals they profess to be protecting, it's time we offer more to those dedicated folks who feed families ? yes ? even the vegetarian ones.

The proposed legislation, called Security from Trespass and Protecting Food Safety Act 2019, will better protect farmers and their families, livestock and food transporters, from interference that in any way poses a threat to families in their own homes and on their own property. Think about that for a moment. Just imagine if someone thought it would be ok to walk up to your front door and block you from accessing your own property. Would you seek protection from the police? Would you have an expectation of privacy on your own property? Of course you would. The legislation will also help to protect farm animals from stress and disease. In one case we were following this past summer, activists were attempting to separate a newly birthed calf from its mother. How is that helping any one? Whose welfare are you interested in when you trespass on private property and attempt to remove an animal, under duress, from its safe and familiar surroundings? Finally, the proposal is also meant to help curb the potential of contaminants introduced in to our food supply and food transporters from being interfered with by ?prohibiting stopping, hindering, obstructing or interfering with a motor vehicle transporting farm animals; and prohibiting interacting with farm animals being transported by a motor vehicle without explicit prior consent.?

Our very own Caledon Mayor, Allan Thompson who is Chair of ROMA, commented; ?Biosecurity is critical to the success of rural communities and the protection of Ontario's food supply. The Rural Ontario Municipal Association (ROMA) is concerned about trespass activities on private farm properties that pose a safety risk to the public, farm families and animals. We appreciate this effort to provide new tools to help keep our communities safe.?(2) I agree and think it is about time we did something to help those people who work hard, every single day of the year to provide food for our tables. Yes, every ? single ? day. There is no ?vacation? from feeding and caring for the animals, you can't take a day off from milking and you sure can't take a peek outside, look at the snow and think, ?hmmmn, maybe I won't go in to work today.?. There is no holiday from tending the crops you had to patiently wait through spring rains to plant hoping against hope that your timing was right and then praying for that rain to come back mid summer to water those same crops that are now drying out in the heat. If one of your animals gives birth in the middle of the night, you're there. If there are complications, you incur hefty veterinarian bills to ensure the animal is cared for. To then have folks come charging through your front gate, trampling your crops or attempting to abduct one of your animals? It's preposterous.

Animal rights activists should know that this legislation is being proposed in conjunction with PAWS, the Provincial Animal Welfare Services Act, to ensure that everyone is acting with the safety and security of animals in mind. In fact, protecting the health and welfare of farm animals forms a significant portion of the legislation with a variety of biosecurity measures required to be in place to protect both them and our food supply. What some activists don't seem to realize (apart from the obvious that trespassing is trespassing no matter your intention) is that simply trudging from one farm to the next in the same pair of boots could cause significant damage. Many of you may not recall an outbreak of foot and mouth disease in England in 2001 that devastated farms across the nation causing billions of dollars in damages and crippling the agricultural industry. This proposed legislation is necessary and long overdue.

Our farmers need to know that they are valued, that their contributions to the economy are significant and that they should be protected in their work just as legislation exists to protect all workers in Ontario. Farmers feed families and last time I checked ? they grow fruits, vegetables and grains too ? meaning they also feed those vegetarian and vegan protestors who trespass. Oh the irony.