



Farmers Need Small Abattoirs

National Farmers Union May, 2011 Update and Suggested Actions

Small, locally-owned, provincially-inspected, multi-species meat and poultry abattoirs are essential to the survival of family farms and rural communities. They provide a crucial link between livestock and poultry farmers and consumers looking for healthy, nutritious, delicious food produced by farmers they know and trust.

Since February 2010, more and more farmers, eaters and organizations have raised their voices in a call to Save Our Small Abattoirs. The Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs, Hon. Carol Mitchell has acknowledged small abattoirs are a critical part of the local food movement and the local economy. Some small abattoirs have received funding to make upgrades or expand their operations, but the minister also admits that funding alone will not solve all the issues.

Small abattoirs and small poultry processors are still closing. Each time a small abattoir closes, farmers lose, the community loses and eaters lose.

What Can We Do?

1. Let politicians from all political parties know how important small abattoirs are to farmers. Contact the Minister of Agriculture, the Premier, agriculture critics, leaders of the opposition parties and our MPPs.
2. This is an election year in Ontario. Ask candidates what they are going to do to save small abattoirs in Ontario and let them know what we think they should do.
3. Continue to raise awareness about the need to save our small abattoirs among family, friends, colleagues and customers.
4. The Federated Women's Institutes of Ontario (FWIO), also have a campaign to save small abattoirs. Talk to local Women's Institutes and work with them to raise awareness and encourage action to save small abattoirs.
5. Talk to other organizations and encourage them to let politicians and political candidates know that small abattoirs are important.

6. Buy locally produced and processed meat either direct from farmers' or from butchers or retailers that purchase their meat from local farmers. When buying meat at a butcher shop, a supermarket, a health food store or a farmers' market ask who raised the animals.
7. Consider whether or not you are willing to pay more for local food, which is often fresher, and therefore healthier and tastier. The individual attention small farmers and abattoirs provide takes extra time and increase the value of local food.

Points to raise with politicians and with political candidates:

Some of the points below come from the work of the Federated Women's Institutes of Ontario.

- Despite increasing support for local food, small abattoirs are closing across Ontario.
- There cannot be local meat without small abattoirs and small poultry processors.
- Small abattoirs across the province are struggling to survive for a variety of reasons. However, lack of demand for their services is not one of them, nor is the decrease in the number of cattle in the province – most small abattoirs and small poultry processors are busier than ever.
- Abattoirs need to be able to stay small. Funding is often directed to abattoirs wanting to expand or develop new markets. Abattoirs who need to make upgrades, especially to aging facilities, must have access to user-friendly funds even if they do not want to expand their operation.
- Abattoir owners need to be able to see and plan for the future. There needs to be a long-term approach to regulatory compliance so that abattoir owners can develop realistic business plans which they can take to the bank.
- Safe food must always be a top priority. Effective regulations and government inspection programs protect family farms, eaters and food processors.
- Food safety regulations must accommodate processors of all sizes and must help maintain and expand the diversity of processors across the province.

Contact the NFU Ontario office (1-888-832-9638 or office@nfuontario.ca) or Ann Slater (519-349-2448 or aslater@quadro.net) for postcards to send to Agriculture Minister Carol Mitchell or for more information. More information is also available on the Perth/Oxford Local webpage – www.nfuontario.ca/341.