



## Evolve Our Prison Farms

### Position Statement

*Correctional Service Canada (CSC) has been engaged in public consultation concerning the possible reinstatement of prison farms, a move widely supported by the general public. To date, however, a viable model has not been generated. The attached proposal offers an “evolved farm” model that incorporates ecological sustainability, rehabilitation, meaningful employment and community development, public security, and fiscal responsibility. This model supports CSC’s mandate to prepare prisoners for safe release through provision of appropriate social, educational, vocational and correctional programming, while simultaneously contributing to the government’s broader goals in the areas of greenhouse gas reduction, sustainability, food security and public health.*

We call upon Public Safety Minister Ralph Goodale and the Government of Canada to:

**Consider our proposal that Canada’s prison farms should evolve toward an ethical and ecologically sustainable model that will contribute to public safety and food security by:**

- i) Protecting farm and food system infrastructure, including valuable farm land, and ensuring that this land produces food that prioritizes ecological sustainability, human health, food security, and fiscal responsibility;**
- ii) Providing work and learning opportunities for prisoners that provide education, life skills, and job skills relevant for reintegration into a society that is increasingly concerned with issues of climate change, public health and animal welfare, and where job opportunities continue to grow in sectors such as organic plant production, food services, and animal care;**
- iii) Providing a coherent model of rehabilitation and therapeutic activity for prisoners that is centred in responsible, responsive, and nurturing relationships with humans, animals, plants, and the environment;**
- iv) Feeding prisoners with nutritious food grown, processed, and prepared by their fellow prisoners;**
- v) Enhancing community partnerships with ecologically responsible farmers, food banks, wildlife and ethology experts, public health providers, and local food stakeholders.**

Submitted by the Evolve Our Prison Farms coalition based in Kingston, Ontario.

January 2017

# A Proposal to Evolve Our Prison Farms

## **Vision**

A forward-looking model for prison farms which is committed to rehabilitation and reintegration; ecological sustainability; a secure and healthy food system; and compassionate and connected communities.

## **What defines the “evolution” of farming?**

There is increasing recognition that farming practices will need to evolve in order to feed a growing human population in a world of finite land, water and other resources.<sup>1</sup> If Correctional Service Canada (CSC) decides to re-establish prison farms, it makes sense to anticipate where farming is headed, rather than chase a disappearing past. Compared to animal agriculture, plant-based farming involves much lower energy and water consumption, greenhouse gas emissions, and pollution.<sup>2</sup> Furthermore, organic, permaculture and agroforestry techniques can help to nurture the soil and support biodiversity. Evolved farms will focus on production of nutrient dense vegetables, legumes, fruits, grains, nuts and seeds. They will use approaches that are ecologically sustainable, technologically sophisticated, and consistent with changing community values around healthy lifestyles, food security, and respect for animals and the environment.

## **Why are prisons the right location for the evolution of farming?**

### Rehabilitation and Reintegration

Prison farms provide unique opportunities for supporting CSC’s mandate of preparing prisoners to safely re-join society. Farming is a fundamentally purposeful and nurturing activity. Moreover, evolved farms require development of skills and knowledge related to complex farm ecologies and sustainability techniques. This is not de-skilled farm grunt work with questionable employment future. Unlike animal agriculture, which has largely replaced workers with technology, evolved farming is labour intensive, and offers learning opportunities and transferable skills applicable to rapidly developing green economies.

Prison farm food production could lead to re-establishment of prison kitchens, allowing for meaningful work and skill development in a variety of food preservation and preparation activities. Perhaps most importantly, evolved prison farms would enable prisoners to make contact with a variety of members of the public – organic farmers, ecologists, food bank operators, chefs, green technology experts, community gardeners, and animal care providers – as visiting experts, supervisors, or community partners. Such relationships are a vital opportunity for prisoners to demonstrate responsibility, and to develop the contacts and relationships beyond prison walls which can be vital to successful transition and reintegration.

Nurturing animals can be an important dimension of farm work, and of psychological healing and personal growth. Dairy and egg farming, however, involve workers in conflicted relationships. Under the old prison farm system, prison farmers engaged in harmful actions such as killing and coercing animals;

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<sup>1</sup> This *Newsweek* article provides an overview of many of the technologies and practices associated with ‘future farming’: <http://www.newsweek.com/2015/10/30/feed-humankind-we-need-farms-future-today-385933.html>

<sup>2</sup> See, for example, Marco Springmann et al (2016) “Analysis and valuation of the health and climate change cobenefits of dietary change” *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences of the United States of America* 113/5 pp. 4146-4151

forcibly impregnating cows; separating calves from their mothers; and confining chickens to crowded, ammonia-saturated spaces. There is an extensive literature documenting the connections between inflicting violence on animals, and inflicting violence on humans. In particular, the evidence connecting slaughterhouse work and domestic violence is compelling.<sup>3</sup> This should raise significant red flags in the context of a prison rehabilitation program. So, while engaging in stewardship and nurturing of animals can have profound psychological benefits under the right conditions, these beneficial effects do not extend to traditional farm relationships based on exploitation and violence.

### Ethically Integrating Animals

An evolved prison farm could benefit from the inclusion of farmed animals (such as the Pen Herd or their descendants) in the form of sanctuary.<sup>4</sup> The natural fertilizer they produce would contribute to the full circle of organic plant-based farming. Even more important would be the mutually therapeutic potential of this arrangement. Farmer Jeanne Selander, who manages the [Sheriff's Office Animal Farm](#),<sup>5</sup> describes how the unconditional love that the inmates experience as they care for injured, abused and abandoned animals, and the joy that the animals demonstrate in response to that care, “changes the inmates and makes them better people.”<sup>6</sup> In the prison farm sanctuary model, the power of this rehabilitation would no longer be sabotaged by the inherent violence of animal commodification, exploitation and slaughter. The sanctuary model is the only non-violent option for ethically integrating animals into the evolved prison farm, and the potential of this model for developing a humane education program and for building bridges with the broader community, is unparalleled.

### Secure and Healthy Food

CSC is responsible for feeding prisoners nutritious and suitable meals. However, the animal foods produced on the old prison farms are not conducive to healthy or appropriate diet options, either for prisoners, or for recipients of donations at local food banks and community kitchens. While dairy products consumed in small quantities are healthy for some humans, most adults are lactose intolerant and should minimize consumption of dairy products.<sup>7</sup> Consumption of meat and dairy is associated with cardiovascular disease, certain cancers (colon, breast, prostate), obesity, diabetes, and other diseases.<sup>8</sup> Every reputable nutritional guideline emphasizes the importance of significantly reducing meat and dairy consumption, and increasing consumption of vegetables, fruits and legumes. (It should be added that animal-based diets are not just unhealthy on an individual level, but contribute to food insecurity at a collective level. Intensive animal farming is a reservoir for zoonotic disease, and routine use of antibiotics on farmed animals has led to a dangerous decline in their effectiveness for treating human infections and disease.)

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<sup>3</sup> See, for example, Amy Fitzgerald, Linda Kalof & Thomas Dietz (2009) “Slaughterhouses and Increased Crime Rates: An Empirical Analysis of the Spillover From ‘The Jungle’ Into the Surrounding Community”, *Organization & Environment* 22/2 pp. 158-184.

<sup>4</sup> A recent petition sponsored by “Save the Herd” garnered over 3,500 signatures in support of providing sanctuary to the Kingston prison herd, in lieu of reinstating dairy farms.

<sup>5</sup> In Florida, the Sheriff’s Office Animal Farm has operated an animal sanctuary for over 10 years:

[http://www.keyso.net/miscellaneous/animal\\_park.htm](http://www.keyso.net/miscellaneous/animal_park.htm)

<sup>6</sup> Selander, Jeanne. Interview by Franccen Neufeld. Telephone interview. August 12, 2016.

<sup>7</sup> 65% of the world adult population is estimated to be lactose intolerant. Rates are highest amongst citizens of Asian, African and South American descent, and lowest amongst citizens of North European descent. Amongst Aboriginal Canadians, the rate of lactose intolerance is estimated to be 80-100%.

<http://www.aafp.org/afp/2002/0501/p1845.html> See also: <https://ghr.nlm.nih.gov/condition/lactose-intolerance#statistics>

<sup>8</sup> <http://www.pcrn.org/health/diets/vegdiets/health-concerns-about-dairy-products>

Plant-based farming is also less expensive. The inputs for animal agriculture (equipment, feed, veterinary care, water, energy, food storage and transportation) far exceed the costs associated with plant-based farming, permaculture or agroforestry. On the old prison farms, prime agricultural land was used to grow crops to feed the cows, who were then “converted” into milk and meat – a notoriously inefficient system for providing food for humans.<sup>9</sup> Moreover, reinstating the old prison dairy farms would incur significant capital and operational costs not associated with plant farming. The old stalls and dairy equipment have been dismantled and would have to be purchased anew; the farms would have to purchase new dairy quota; the food safety regulatory environment has changed, increasing start-up costs for meat and dairy production facilities; and animal welfare regulations involve additional oversight costs.

In short, evolved plant-based farms would provide prisons with more food, of higher nutritional value, and at a lower cost to CSC.

### Prisons as key sites for ecologically sustainable farming

The prime agricultural land and infrastructure of the old prison farms represents an important legacy and resource that should not be allowed to fragment and fritter away. In addition to the opportunity for re-establishing local food production on a humane and sustainable footing, some of these lands occupy important sites near or within cities, abutting sensitive ecological habitats. As such, they are ideally situated for piloting farming techniques that sustain local pollinators and wildlife, contribute to wildlife corridors and connectivity, and facilitate reintegration of food production into urban life.

The closed hierarchical system of prisons offers a unique setting to pilot an integrated ecological “farm to table” approach to food production, distribution, and preparation. Sustainable principles could be applied to the stewardship of the land, the growing of food, the storage and distribution of food to other prisons (and local food banks/kitchens), and the preparation of food in prison kitchens. Prison farms could serve as demonstration or seed projects for local communities seeking integrated and ecologically sensitive approaches to zoning, planning and food production – constituting a vital link in an ecologically integrated web sustaining the health of neighbouring communities and ecosystems. While this would extend beyond CSC’s core mandate, it could represent an important symbol of the government’s larger commitment to sustainability and meeting its GHG reduction targets.

### Compassionate and Connected Communities

Evolved prison farms would be built on a foundation of responsible stewardship and interconnectivity – of personal health and development; of flourishing ecosystems and wildlife; and of relationships extending across and beyond prison walls. The potential for these farms to be integrated with prison education programs, prison-community partnerships, and post-release transition and employment programs is limited only by our imagination.

This is not a one size fits all model. The guiding principles can be adapted to different geographies, community partnerships, and prison populations. For example, some Canadian regions can support fruit and nut tree plantations. Others might be more suitable for growing pulses, or mixed vegetables. Prisons located close to larger population centres might be suitable for housing companion animal rehab and adoption programs, or establishing community gardens to supply local food banks. Locations near

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<sup>9</sup> It takes approximately 6 times as much land to produce 1 kilogram of animal protein (by feeding plants like corn and soy to animals) as it does to produce 1 kilogram of vegetable protein (eating plants directly).

<http://www.news.cornell.edu/stories/1997/08/us-could-feed-800-million-people-grain-livestock-eat>

See also: <http://www.worldwatch.org/node/549>

ecologically sensitive habitat may be more suitable for pilot projects in ecological restoration, climate change mitigation, or wildlife rescue and rehabilitation. Prisons housing a more urban prisoner population might be suitable for pilot projects in urban gardening, cookery, or green micro energy and water management.

All of these projects could provide opportunities for meaningful work and skill development for prisoners, for physical and intellectual activity, and for the psychological benefits of engaging in responsible stewardship and contributing to the larger community.

### Why is farming evolution the right vision at the right time?

The re-establishment of prison farms offers a unique juncture for clarifying, enriching, and expanding a genuinely progressive approach to prison programming. Public mobilization around the prison farm issue has brought together an impressive array of interested and concerned citizens, demonstrating a high level of interest, commitment, and community support for farm programs. Canadians want prisons to offer meaningful rehabilitation and reintegration programming – opportunities for psychological healing and growth, for relevant skill acquisition (general life skills, not just job-specific training), and for community contacts and relationships to facilitate the transition to life outside of prison. The potential synergies of healthy food production, ecological stewardship, rehabilitation and community reintegration present an exciting opportunity – one not to be missed.

#### Rehabilitation & Reintegration

- Promote psychological healing and growth
- Teach responsibility, nurturance and team-work
- Create opportunities for prisoners to develop personal contacts with individuals and groups outside the prison
- Offer meaningful life skills and job skills development in rapidly growing green economies

#### Ecological Sustainability

- Establish plant-based farms to minimize GHG emissions, reduce pollution and conserve water
- Use organic and permaculture techniques to save and enhance soil, and to support beneficial organisms and pollinators
- Promote biodiversity through adjacent wetland protection, reforestation and agroforestry, habitat corridors, and wildlife-friendly farming and planting practices
- Preserve critical farmland around our cities to support local food production

### Evolve Our Prison Farms

#### Secure & Healthy Food

- Reintegrate food production into urban life
- Produce healthful vegetables, fruits and legumes for consumption in prisons and local shelters/food banks
- Re-establish prison kitchens and the opportunity to develop key skills in food preservation and preparation

#### Compassionate & Connected Communities

- Encourage local farmers, ecologists, green technologists, landscapers and chefs to participate in prison farm advisory and training programs
- Establish animal rehabilitation/sanctuary programs, native plant nursery or community garden programs which complement plant-based farming
- Establish post-release transition jobs at local farms, restaurants, or animal shelters/rehab centres
- Cross fertilize prison education curricula with prison farms (nutrition, food politics, ecological and indigenous science, animal care, ecological landscaping)

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