

Years later, still looking for clarity on Correctional Service Canada's prison farm plans

But with unsettling evidence now leaking into the public domain, CSC is doubling down on its efforts to control public perceptions and the fifth estate, disparaging any reporting not grounded in CSC's own propaganda as being 'not grounded in fact.'



Calvin Neufeld

Opinion

Re: "Clarity needed on prison farm program, says CSC," (*The Hill Times*, March 17). When it comes to the Correc-

tional Service Canada's new prison farm program, I couldn't agree more on this point: clarity is precisely what's needed. It's what our advocacy group, Evolve Our Prison Farms, has been seeking for years. CSC's letter argues that the claims in Helen Forsey's article ("Scandal brewing over feds' prison farm plan," March 8) are "not grounded in fact." In fact, I have in my possession the evidence that proves Forsey right, and CSC wrong.

I have spent the past five years investigating every aspect of the new (and still unfolding) prison farm program. Since 2018, I have filed 63 access-to-information requests and received thousands of pages of documents which, despite redactions, provide the very facts that CSC continues to deny.

CSC denies that "plans were already established for a large goat dairy program." The documents I have obtained, such as CSC's "Nutrient Management Strategy: Corcan Farms (fall 2018-fall 2023)," provide precise details of a plan very much established for a large goat dairy operation. Number of goats: 2,200. Size of milking barn: 44,000 square feet. Housing conditions: confinement. Size of manure lagoon: 14 feet deep, 120 feet in diameter. Five-year material production of solid waste: 495,803 cubic feet. That's just for the goats.

For the 90 dairy cows, CSC will construct a separate milking barn to produce milk purely for research quota (non-

consumption). This will add a 16,200 square foot facility generating an additional 194,665 cubic feet of solid waste and 222,399 cubic feet of liquid waste. There is also the volume of milking centre washwater (202,686 cubic feet from the cows, 241,032 cubic feet from the goats), which "is exposed to high concentrations of chlorinated alkaline solutions, acidified waters and heavy detergents that can harm the environment." The documents further note that "bacteria in the milk can transmit disease," yet the distance from surrounding wells and waterways is calculated in metres.

Does CSC really expect readers to believe that its plans for a large goat dairy operation are not established, or that the development of this program was done "with primary consideration given to the benefits for participants"? The only beneficiaries of the prison industrial goat farm are industry stakeholders, and as Forsey points out, the addition of cows is mere window-dressing. The recent academic report, "Canada's Proposed Prison Farm Program: Why It Won't Work and What Would Work Better," by professors Amy Fitzgerald and Amanda Wilson, shows that CSC's current prison farm plan will not benefit prisoners, staff, or local communities. Quite the contrary.

At a loss for any real defence, CSC resorts to pointing out that they have not yet procured any goats, but this is not for lack of trying. CSC issued two public

requests for proposals in 2018 and 2019, available for viewing on buyandsell.gc.ca, for the first 800 female dairy goat kids. Internal documents reveal that both procurement attempts failed for multiple reasons, including farmers' assertions that the conditions—such as minimum delivery of 200 kids per contract—were impossible to meet. That didn't stop CSC from purchasing a bulk dairy cooler with a capacity to store a maximum daily production of 9,000 litres of goats' milk, which, according to Ontario Goat, would require some 3,200 goats in active milking (not counting "dry" does and kids). CSC's ambitions for their prison industrial goat farm are detailed, established, and ambitious indeed.

In light of the facts, it is audacious and ironic for CSC to issue a call for "clarity" (now that the manure is hitting the fan) when Evolve Our Prison Farms has spent years painstakingly seeking the truth and extracting the evidence from underneath CSC's "heap of verbiage extolling the benefits of the prison farms," as Forsey put it.

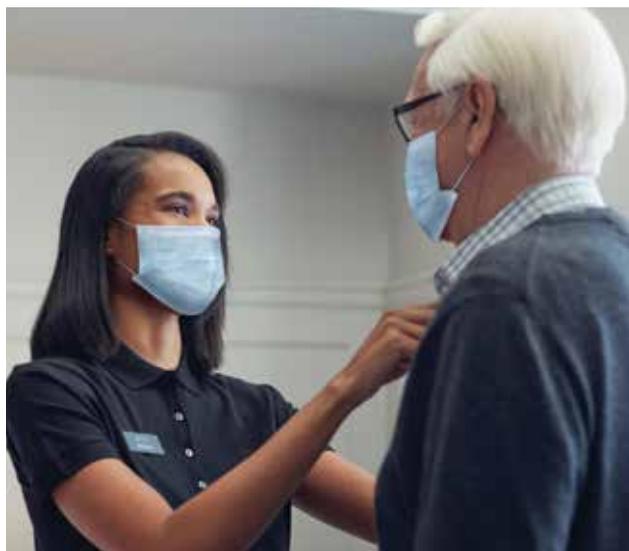
With unsettling evidence now leaking into the public domain, CSC is doubling down on its efforts to control public perceptions and the fifth estate, disparaging any reporting not grounded in CSC's own propaganda as being "not grounded in fact."

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The Hill Times

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