

Prison farm project had much advisory panel guidance

A proposal originally recommended \$9.75 M over five years from Correction Services Canada (CSC), of which \$1.2 million was to build a small processing unit

BY IAN CUMMING
Ontario Farmer

The proposed \$6.2-million barn at the Joyceville Prison was to house 2,200 milking goats and 60 milking cows all under one roof. It was supposed to be fully operational by June 2020, but construction has not commenced 14 months after that target date.

This “dual functioning barn” was in the report ‘New Proposal for Re-Opening of Correctional

Service of Canada’s Penitentiary Farm Operations’ submitted on May 18, 2018 by the Farm Advisory Council to the Canadian government, concerning the two prison farms at Kingston

The farm advisory panel, which consisted of two NFU farmers, one independent farmer, one nun, and one person from the John Howard Society, had been given the mandate to submit a proposal to the government that “demonstrated sustainable livestock operations at no extra cost.”

A March 17, 2017 internal government document states that this group are “to provide non-binding advice relating to the re-opening of the CORCAN farms.” The meetings were to be “as required” and these people were “voluntary appointments

for one year.”

Ontario Farmer was able to recently obtain over 500 pages of documents and emails from the federal government through filed Access to Information requests, concerning the prison farms.

The proposal submitted by the board recommended \$9.75 million over five years from Correction Services Canada (CSC), of which \$1.2 million was to build a small processing unit.

Salaries for prisoners to run the operations at Joyceville and Collins Bay were estimated at \$140,000 per year. The panel wrote that the operation would reach “full sustainability by 2021” and cautioned there could be a \$275,000 leeway in operational funding during the first three years of operation.

The dry cows and calves were to be kept over at the Collins Bay facility.

Then Minister Ralph Goodale signed off on the farm panel report as ‘approved’ on June 4, 2018.

“Options and recommendations will be subject to cabinet confidence,” stated the documents. The cabinet would have to weigh that existing prison programs were already enabling 14,479 prisoners per year to successfully complete a certified course, and 572 at the facility per year to become registered as apprentices, it stated.

Questions about these proposed costs and expenses for the prison farms, raised by several MPs from Ontario to British Columbia, resulted in a flurry of emails between government officials as proposed responses were sent and re-sent to have “the flow of the response” perfected, before replying.

Sarah Milchak from CSC worried to other government officials that there was the perception that “we are only listening to the Farm Advisory Panel,” noting that OMAFRA and Environment Canada officials were also being consulted.

There were 13 meetings between the farm panel and the government from June 2017 until January 2019.

It was in the February 28, 2018 federal budget, where the government announced \$4.3 million in funding to re-open the prison farms.

Prior to and at that time, CSC

had 12 land lease agreements with area farmers, which were up for renewal from 2016 to 2021. These acres were not renewed as the leases ended, with the prison land being farmed by the government.

Government documentation states that \$3.7 million was to be spent from that allocated amount in the first two years. The remaining announced \$600,000 “was the calculable depreciation cost for the model and not actual funding available.”

Funds for infrastructure (buildings, demolition and renovations) “were not included in the new funding as these costs would be absorbed by CSC as part of the current capital funding.”

Correspondence from Dairy Farmers of Ontario (DFO) to CSC concerning how to obtain milk quota was redacted, but below the blackened-out portion CSC states, “this will allow a small dairy operation to be included.”

“Obtaining additional quota in the future is not a feasible assumption to include in the analysis and plan,” it stated.

Equipment and livestock purchases were budgeted at \$1,258,000 at year one and \$700,000 on year two. None of that included milking parlour funding, although vacuum pumps and bulk tanks were included in the planned purchases.

This money has been spent, but mainly all on field equipment.

Pesticide review timing raises concerns about Ottawa’s intent

Additional research funding for pesticide research will be allocated

BY ALEX BINKLEY
Ontario Farmer

Ottawa - Just before the launch of a widely expected election campaign, the federal government has launched a review of its pesticide registration process to ensure the existing approval system meets public expectations.

It says that, while the current regulations under which the Pesticide Management Review Agency (PMRA) assesses pesticides, provide robust protection of human health and the environment, the review process needs to be reviewed to ensure it “meets the expectations of Canadians in the areas of transparency and sustainability.”

Agriculture Minister Marie-Claude Bibeau, Health Minister Patti Hadju, and Environment Minister Jonathan Wilkinson, said there will be no changes to pesticide limits on food until the spring while officials examine the review process and strengthen PMRA’s capacity to conduct reviews.

They also announced new research funding to “give farmers greater access to better products and to adopt new and alternative approaches to pest management that reduce risk

while addressing the concerns of Canadians.”

CropLife Canada, which represents pesticide manufacturers, said it was concerned with the apparent arbitrary decision to suspend some of the PMRA’s review functions. “While we support increased regulatory transparency, it is important that the regulatory process does not become politicized.”

“The need to maintain a science-based regulatory process is important for the vitality of the sector and the credibility of Health Canada/PMRA as a trusted regulator, in Canada and internationally.”

“In order to remain innovative, the Canadian agricultural sector needs access to safe and efficient tools to protect their crops. Pesticides are an important tool for farmers to produce sustainable, affordable and high-quality food.” CropLife recently released a report, Helping Canada Grow, on the benefits of pesticides and plant breeding innovations.

Grain Growers of Canada said the regulatory process must be kept free of political interference. While there was not enough detail in the government’s announcement “to determine whether this process is at risk, we do expect government to allow science to prevail.”

“We must hold ourselves to the same high standards we expect of like-minded countries around the world.”

It welcomed increased trans-

parency in the regulatory process because it will create “even more confidence in our regulators and even greater public trust of our industry overall. We continue to advocate for a science-based approach to regulatory decision-making.”

PMRA will receive \$50 million over the next three years “to further strengthen its human and environmental health and safety oversight and protection, including improving the availability of independent data to further support pesticide review decisions, and the transparency of decision-making,” the ministers said.

It will receive \$8 million “to accelerate the research, development and adoption of alternative pest management solutions.”

When conducting pesticide approvals, Health Canada considers data and information provided by manufacturers; published scientific reports; federal, provincial, and territorial governments; other regulatory agencies; and Canadians, they said.

“This new funding will increase the availability of independent data in this process by parties such as universities, NGOs and governments. This funding will allow Health Canada to increase independent data generation, including new water and agricultural monitoring data.”

“It will also allow the creation of a new expert panel process to provide advice, as appropriate, prior to evidence-based decisions of the PMRA on pesticides.”

Packing



Lucas Keffer and John Van Gent throw old tires down to hold plastic in place on haylage at Cranbrook Farms near Blyth (PHOTO BY SHARON GROSE)