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THE HILL TIMES

PUBLISHED EVERY MONDAY AND WEDNESDAY BY
 HILL TIMES PUBLISHING INC.
 246 Queen Street, Ottawa, Ontario K1P 5E4

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Editorial

Budget delay leaves Canadians quivering in anticipation

Federal governments do like a bit of mystery and drama when it comes to announcing budget release dates. The day on which the budget will be unveiled is usually as guarded as the document itself, leaving some to resort to spy-like tactics—such as checking out printing contracts—to try and get ahead of the game.

But even for a government that loves nothing more than teasing about events that will happen “in due course” or in the “days and weeks to come,” the Liberals’ drawn-out budget process is ridiculous.

As the *Globe and Mail* recently reported: “Researchers at the Library of Parliament analyzed the number of days between each budget since 1867. As of March 9, 2021, it has been 721 days since the last federal budget was tabled on March 19, 2019. Prior to this, the longest period between two budgets was 651 days, between Feb. 28, 2000, and Dec. 10, 2001.”

Partisans have said that there’s nothing to be done for it. The last time a budget was scheduled was March 30, 2020, and everyone knows how that turned out. There was no expectation that a budget was going to happen as originally scheduled, and hey, we got a pair of financial updates in the summer and fall, a “snapshot” and economic statement, respectively.

Sure, but it’s March again, and there’s still no hard date for when the budget will be tabled.

“We will be announcing the date of the upcoming budget in due course. But I can tell you that we are focused very much on

getting us through this global pandemic that has been the challenge that we face for a full year now,” Prime Minister Justin Trudeau said on March 9. “We are working on the budget. It will be coming soon.”

This comment followed a *Globe and Mail* report on March 8 that said a senior government official had ruled out any budget being handed down this month.

Previously, the government’s argument was that there were many unknowns, thanks to the COVID-19 pandemic. The country had gone into a heretofore unseen lockdown and the economy ground to a halt. A year later, there are still many unknowns, but there’s also a great deal of evidence and real-world experience to inform assumptions going forward.

While all dealing with the pandemic, G7 countries around the world have tabled budgets, as have Canadian provincial governments. Mr. Trudeau held a series of virtual town hall meetings in the fall, so clearly the ability to consult and meet with Canadians on the budget—which didn’t happen until Finance Minister Chrystia Freeland and Associate Finance Minister Mona Fortier launched consultations in late January—has been there.

Will there be a widespread third wave as the vaccine rollout ramps up? Maybe. But predicating another delay of the budget on that possibility is looking less like stewardship and more like cowardice.

No one knows what tomorrow will bring, even in non-pandemic times, but that doesn’t mean you stop planning for the future.

The Hill Times

Letters to the Editor

Clarity needed on prison farm program, says CSC

Re: “Scandal brewing over feds’ prison farm plan,” (*The Hill Times*, March 8, online).

We wanted to provide clarifications regarding a piece published in the *Hill Times*, including more information on Correctional Service Canada’s (CSC) penitentiary farms in the Kingston area. We hope that the information is useful to readers.

CSC announced on March 5 that it was pausing the planned dairy goat program because of the financial impacts of COVID-19 on the Service’s operations, but that CSC is continuing its dairy cow program, already in development. The decision was taken after careful consideration of the continued impacts of the pandemic. The piece published states that plans were already established for a large goat dairy program, whose milk would be supplied for export. In fact, CSC has not yet procured any dairy goats, nor has it entered into any negotiations or contracts with any potential buyers of goat milk. The program is not yet started and speculation as to how it will be operated is not grounded in fact. As part of CSC’s offender employment program, the penitentiary farm dairy program results from extensive consultation with the local farming community, with primary consideration given to the benefits for participants, notably in terms of skills development.

The article also states that a large dairy operation would not provide employment benefits for offenders who work on the program. However, according to Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada, 2.3 million people were employed in the agriculture and agri-food system across Canada in 2018. Food and beverage processing sales totalled \$114.9-billion, nearly \$15-million (13 per cent) of which were generated by the dairy industry. CSC’s CORCAN agriculture program is designed to reflect various portions of Canadian agriculture, which we are proud to represent

in the options that we offer our program participants. In addition to the dairy operations, the penitentiary farms offer on-the-job training in other diverse parts of the farming industry, including crop production, horticulture, beekeeping, maple syrup production, fence repair, green zone and environmental activities, forestry management, and livestock care and operations. CSC trains and certifies offenders to work in this sector and CSC farms also prepare offenders to work in other industries. The program provides transferable skills as well as helps them build essential skills for employment, such as communication and teamwork. CSC’s CORCAN agriculture program also offers offenders a chance to give back to the local community. In fact, offenders involved in crop production grow vegetables for their own consumption, as well as for donation to the local food bank. This includes growing a row in these gardens to contribute to Loving Spoonful, a charitable organization in the Kingston community.

CSC has been gradually implementing the penitentiary farm program since 2018. It has provided federal offenders with various employment program assignments related to agricultural operations and has enabled them to earn 247 vocational certifications. Providing employment, vocational training, and employability skills to both men and women offenders supports their rehabilitation and helps lower rates of reoffending. This is in direct support of CSC’s mandate to enhance public safety by helping offenders become productive, law-abiding citizens, and skilled workers when they return to the community.

We welcome any future opportunities to provide information about any of our operations.

Isabelle Robitaille
 Acting manager, issue management and
 media relations
 Communications and Engagement Sector
 Correctional Service Canada

Prison farm pause a good chance to reconsider program: reader

I am very happy to see that the dairy goat operation has been placed on pause, as per the CSC’s March 5 news release, and think Canadians should look at this from the aspect of why the Penitentiary Farm Program is terrible for inmates; many inmates have themselves been victimized within their lives, and many are incarcerated for violent acts. Exposing inmates to situations where violence is inflicted upon animals will do little to rehabilitate and will likely instead exacerbate inmates’ issues. When it comes to dairy farming, involvement in forcibly impregnating cows and forcibly removing newborn calves from their mothers exposes inmates to immeasurable pain and suffering, as well as desensitizes them to these acts of violence, which is extremely inappropriate for an inmate population.

Even if inmates are able to feel they are, in some sense, caring for and bond-

ing with these animals, seeing newborns suffering without their mothers and then sent for slaughter or started as a dairy calf will undoubtedly cause trauma, worsen existing and create new psychological issues in this already vulnerable, hurting community, not to mention when dairy cows are “retired” and sent to slaughter. Very similar issues will be seen within a goat farming operation, or any other animal farming operation.

The CSC has an incredible opportunity to take a different direction and invest instead in plant-based crops and farming, which could supply food to the inmate population itself as well as outside of it. This is an excellent opportunity for the CSC to be a part of something truly sustainable and positive for inmates, the environment, and animals alike.

Kirsten Dika
 Sherwood Park, Alta.



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circulation@hilltimes.com
 613-288-1146

THE HILL TIMES

Published every Monday and
 Wednesday by Hill Times
 Publishing Inc.

246 Queen Street, Ottawa, Ontario K1P 5E4

(613) 232-5952

Fax (613) 232-9055

Canadian Publications Mail Agreement No. 40068926
 www.hilltimes.com

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 Deadline is Wednesday at noon, Ottawa time, for
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 Wednesday edition. Please include your full name,
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