

Ray Plett

EXHIBIT NUMBER: FR-016  
File Name: Hog Review  
Date: April 14, 2007  
Received by: (Commission Secretary)

### My Passion

The slogan the Manitoba Egg Producers have adopted is "We love what we do". This describes my feeling precisely! I enjoy trying to achieve optimum production from my laying hens, because I know that like human beings, chickens produce best when their needs are met, and they are content. This requires close attention to things like adequate, clean water, high quality, nutritious feed, clean, fresh air, physical health, and safety. If their production is at the optimum, all outward manifestations are normal, and my in barn alarm systems are functional, I am content.

In the grain sector my interests are just as intense. I enjoy trying new crops, varieties, seeding rates, fertilizer rates, crop rotations, etc. Making a living at what I do is of course a major reason for doing what I do, but my wife often accuses me of just farming for the enjoyment of it. I grew up on a small farm, left the farm to train as an automotive mechanic, worked at repairing vehicles, taught Power Mechanics for three years, but came back to the farm. I have also always taken pride in the fact that I could do what I enjoyed doing while helping to feed hungry people, supplying them with healthy, affordable food, especially after seeing millions of starving people during a 3 year term of relief service in India and Pakistan. Food is one of the most basic needs a person has, second only to water and hockey, sorry, water and air. I have always taken for granted that what farmers risk large amounts of money doing, and spend a lot of long hours at, would naturally be appreciated by those who work at other jobs. I'm afraid that in recent years I have come to realize things have changed, or else I have been very naive all of my life. Never would I have imagined that so many people would find so many ways to prevent us from supplying them with affordable, healthy food.

I am very grateful indeed that the CEC meetings are giving farmers, through meetings like this, an opportunity to tell the public about the activities, difficulties and successes encountered in achieving their goals in a world where rules and regulations take up an incredible amount of time and are difficult, at times

impossible to comply with. To interact with producers with regards to things that could be implemented on the farm to improve relationships with neighbors, introduce methods and regulations that would be friendlier to the environment and their animals seems to me to be a huge step forward. Just recently I completed a face to face farm survey that took 2 hours to complete, and that I hope will never be used in any farm regulation development, because even the individual doing the interview shook his head at the absolute irrelevance of most of the questions. It must have been developed in an office high above the city of Ottawa where there is never a smell of chicken manure! I feel that farm regulations need to always be constructed to allow for the unforeseen problems that often accompany our work. There are many things that happen on the farm that are entirely out of the control of the operator of a farm, and regulations that are iron clad may cause serious problems at times.

I can live with regulations that have been constructed through dialog, with all concerned groups having opportunity for input. When regulations are written without a good understanding of farm procedures and practices frustration and noncompliance are the result.

I believe that meetings like this are organized to address particular concerns identified by individuals and organizations that have a desire to assure that food is produced in a responsible and sustainable manner. There are many groups that are of major concern to me with regards, especially to the production of food.

40 years ago when I was in India for a three year term of service on a food for work project there was a lot more hunger and starvation than now, and in this horrible situation I remember hearing that there was enough food in the world to feed it's population, if only there was proper distribution of the food produced, but that in 20 years there would not be enough food, even with proper distribution.

Now, almost 40 years later, I believe the same still holds true. There is still enough food to go around, and except for

disproportionate distribution, there would be enough for all. What has happened? Why is there still enough food to go around? A concerted effort by plant breeders who have come up with higher yielding cultivars, scientists developing more efficacious chemicals, equipment capable of getting more work done, and farmers adapting new methods to enhance production is what has happened. I believe that farmers need to do whatever possible to protect this important progress. This must be done with careful consideration for the health and welfare of humans, animals and environment. In my opinion there are too many individuals and organization that take a much too narrow, single faceted approach to food production. These views are often propagated from a position of very little if any information, the withholding of important information, and through half truths and deceit.

A piece in a recent Manitoba Co-operator had me seething at first, than I had a feeling of incredulity, and finally mirth. Its title was **City dweller drives “Quit Stalling” campaign**. When I have a problem with my teeth, I go to the dentist, not the plumber. When the plumbing is leaking I don't go to the dentist, but to the plumber. So how come we would listen to a city dweller when the topic of discussion is farm animals? I quote; **King herself has never visited an intensive livestock operation**. She says” **I've driven by one, and that's pretty shocking: it could have been in Winnipeg.**” Can you become a banker by driving past a bank? She lives in a fancy apartment, and doesn't even have an animal with her. She goes on, **It's certainly not my idea of a farm. I do have a concern that some of these huge hogs barn are putting small farmers right out of business**”. She seems to think that farmers can still make a living on a few pigs and a couple of chickens. If you have been to Mexico or Cuba you will have seen many farms with a few chickens and a couple of hogs and you have observed the living conditions these farmers find themselves in. In Canada, if allowed to farm in a fashion that will sustain an average life style today, we need to farm in a much different manner than we did when I was a boy. Is our farm a factory? Or is it just larger?

Quoting Ms. King"; **I work for a huge company and understand business, and I wish everybody would make a good living at all times**". I agree that small farms are a thing of the past, and that larger farms have bought them out, but how did the firm she works for get so large. Were there not smaller business that had to sell out to this larger one? How is that so different?

To nobody is animal welfare as important as to farmers whose livelihood is dependent on the wellbeing of their animals. Are our chickens living in such deplorable conditions today? Do our city friends know why we now prefer to produce eggs with our hens in cages? Let me enumerate a few reasons, and there are others. In my boyhood our chickens on the floor were often infested with chicken lice that breed by the millions on the chickens, the roost, litter and wherever. Insecticides were needed to deal with this problem. Coccidiosis was a constant threat, and medication was used in an attempt to keep the birds healthy. Often the chickens were beset with internal pests as well. Two weeks ago I had a chat with a professor in the faculty of Ag. at the U of M. He told me about some of the findings in a recent experiment. When dissecting some birds, half floor and half cage rose he found the cage chickens intestines clean while the floor ones were infested with worms.

Just one more example on this topic of keeping birds in cages vs. on the floor. MEP has a set of cages just like you would find in most laying hen barns today that are taken to several shows around Manitoba throughout the year to try to educate the public on the ways of the modern farm. At the Brandon winter fair, I was manning the booth and a young woman came by. She stood at a distance with a look of disgust on her face and I thought, oh oh here we go. But I screwed up my courage and stepped over to her and asked her opinion on what she observed. She said that what she saw here was disgusting, and that she raised her chickens free range. I asked how many chickens she had, and she replied that now she had only one. I was getting more curious and made bold

to ask why she now had only one. She answered, somewhat embarrassed, that a fox had killed the rest!

The layers on our farm drink regularly tested water; eat feed that is very carefully formulated for correct proteins, vitamins, and trace elements. Rarely does a human being receive such carefully controlled nutrition. Very rarely is any medication required! The air intake and distribution is carefully regulated by computer controlled fans, air inlets and distribution ducts. Dust and manure are regularly removed, and there are no flies, lice or eye blinding ammonia around! Cage space, feed trough space, drinking nipple numbers are all made according to the latest scientific knowledge! Would you want to live in a cage, is the most frequently asked question? My answer is no, but I am not a chicken.

Just one more quotation, **“ they are living, breathing animals...they feel, they have the same nervous system as you and I, I’m sure they literally go insane in those sow stalls”**.

Conspicuously absent, and rightly so, from this statement is that they don’t have the same brain. If they don’t have the same brain, how can we know how they feel about things, other than non-verbal communication through outward manifestations? When mortality and sickness are negligible and production is considerably higher than floor birds achieve one can assume that things are well. Chickens will however, audibly tell their caregivers if something is wrong. Someone with experience with domestic fowl can tell, especially after lights out whether all is well or not. A fellow egg producer told me of a situation on his farm where he had been gone for a couple of days, and coming home walked into his barn and noticed immediately that there was something amiss. The sound of the flock alerted him. One row of birds was without feed. They had not received their feed that day because of a feeder breakdown. Another notice of mistreatment came over the course of the next two weeks in the form of a production slump!

If on the other hand we assume that hens don’t want to be in cages, and hogs don’t want to be in stalls because humans don’t,

how do we account for the Winnipeg Humane Society  
the spaying and neutering of cats and dogs? Don't you think we  
ought to have another display, beside the crated hog that is taken to  
malls and various protestation sites, with a sad looking puppy with  
a small box at his side displaying his testicles?

A humorous story told by KAP president David Rolff.