



**Communist Party of Canada
Parti communiste du Canada**

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Manitoba Clean Environment Commission
May 8, 2007

Re: Hog Production Industry Review

Dear Friends,

I hope you will accept this late submission; we were busy with the election nomination deadline for our candidates yesterday.

The Communist Party of Canada - Manitoba Committee is submitting the brief we wrote for the 2000 Livestock Stewardship Initiative along with the following comments.

We are very pleased that the Manitoba government adopted our proposal from 2000 for a moratorium on the expansion of hog farming.

We believe that special attention and studies need to be made still by experts into the numbers, working conditions and wages of hog farm workers. The statistics we presented on these subjects in our 2000 brief are one of the few compilations in Manitoba.

Much more attention needs to be paid to workers in the industry, and it would be major failure if a final report from your Review does not point out either the need for further study of the issue or bring to light the extent of attention - or lack of it - in the submissions you have received on these issues.

We are also including here our current policies related to agriculture in the 2007 provincial election:

Support family farms

- Control farm input prices and establish non-profit agencies to market farm products.
- Ban the use of food grains to produce ethanol
- A moratorium on the expansion of all livestock farming until environmental laws require sustainability; prompt action to reduce environmentally harmful farming practices.
- Remove government income supports for large, corporate farms.
- Support organic farming and reduce or ban the use of antibiotics, fertilizers, pesticides and other potentially harmful inputs.
- Ban terminator seeds and require labeling of all Genetically Modified products.

Manitoba governments have given a green light too long for giant agro-industrial monopolies to ruin family farms.

Yours Truly,

Darrell Rankin,
Leader, CPC - Manitoba

Attachment

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(Commission Secretary)

Brief on the expansion of the livestock industry in Manitoba

Presented by Darrell Rankin

On behalf of the Communist Party of Canada – Manitoba

July 31, 2000

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On behalf of the Communist Party of Canada in Manitoba, I would like to thank the Livestock Stewardship Initiative panel for the opportunity to present our views on the expansion of the livestock industry in Manitoba.

I represent the Communist Party that for seventy-nine years has been in the struggle for jobs, social programs, peace and disarmament, for respect and equality of First and other nations in Canada, for Canadian sovereignty and socialism.

Not least we have fought to defend the family farm and fought for improvements to the lives of workers, including in the rural areas of the province. Our members have been active in farmers' movements and in efforts to organize farm workers, for example with the United Farm Workers efforts to organize First Nations and migrant farm workers in the 1970s.

One of the most noticeable features of the public discussion paper issued by the Livestock Stewardship Initiative is its complete failure to address the terrible conditions and the near total lack of rights of workers in the livestock industry.

No figures are given on the number or conditions of workers who are employed or expected to be employed in the livestock industry. No laws that might concern farm workers are listed among the many others considered relevant to the livestock industry.

The Communist Party brief will focus on these two omissions, and explain why we are calling for a moratorium on the expansion of the hog livestock industry in Manitoba at all levels. We fully support the views of thousands of Manitobans who are concerned about the indisputable and dangerous consequences of the livestock industry on the natural environment and on public health.

Recent decades have seen enormous and accelerating changes in agricultural technologies, methods of production, and not least relations of production in the rural economy. It is more important than ever to put people and nature ahead of profit in agriculture and the food industry as a whole.

Super-exploitation of farm workers

Farm workers are some of the most super-exploited workers in Canada. This is one of the main reasons why the rural population has a lower income than those who live in cities. The growth of large-scale industrial hog and poultry production is creating alongside it a much larger rural working class on farms that are denied some of the most basic rights enjoyed by other workers. This situation cannot continue.

The average hourly wage of farm workers in Manitoba from 1996 to 1998 ranged from \$9.04 to \$9.96; for workers on livestock farms it ranged from \$8.16 to \$9.76 in the same period. The average wage paid to workers in Manitoba paid by the hour in 1998 (excluding agricultural workers) was just over \$13.60 an hour. Farm workers in this period earned at least 27 to 40 per cent less than the average wage in Manitoba.

A newspaper article reports that trained hog farm workers can expect a wage of about \$8.50 an hour. This incredible exploitation of farm workers is made worse by the near total lack of labour standards.

Farm workers are specifically excluded from coverage of the Employment Standards Code* with the exception of lost wages and equal wages for work of equal value. There is no regulation of hours of work, minimum wage, overtime pay, general holidays, vacation, weekly day of rest, work breaks, call-in wages, maternity and parental leave, termination wages and the right to refuse work on Sundays.

Overall wage income for full time farm workers will be even lower as a result of no paid overtime.

Manitoba farm operators hired about 5,578 full-time employees in 1995. Another 7,400 of Manitoba's 23,000 farms that year also hired part time or seasonal farm employees, perhaps totaling another 12,000 farm workers.** The 1995 census reports 6,283 Manitoba farms paid wages and salaries to non-family members, totaling almost \$84 million. The rapid expansion of the industrial livestock farms in recent years has probably increased these numbers significantly.

Year-round employment increased by 39 per cent from 1990 to 1995, while seasonal employment increased by only one per cent in the same period. This indicates that the rural working class is growing at a rapid rate.

Where are these workers coming from? Most new farm workers were born and raised on the Prairies. Figures on employment at the Maple Leaf meat packing plant in Brandon provide an indication. There workers with a First Nations background make up 43 per cent of the labour force. First Nations people, who have suffered from the colonial theft of their land, are now serving as a source of cheap labour in Manitoba's farm and food processing industries, much like their position as seasonal harvesters for some crops documented by the United Farm Workers in the 1970s.

Another source is farm operators or their families. In short, some farms increasingly are sources of wage labour; others are increasingly users of farm labour.

A 1998 Statistics Canada survey reports that almost 60 per cent of Canadian farms had off-farm employment income, averaging \$13,853. If one deducts self-employed income, this last total comes to an average wage and salary income of \$12,426. Wage and salary income made up 56 per cent of total off-farm income; the rest comes from pensions, investments and government farm support programs.

A news release from the Manitoba Pork Council, reported in the *Winnipeg Free Press* on June 28, indicates that the hog industry is promising to develop a workplace health and safety manual for hog barn workers. This is shameful that no government agency has compiled such a manual and provided a copy to all hog farm workers until now.

The health hazards associated with working in hog farms is well known, including chronic respiratory illnesses, exposure to pathogens transmitted from hogs, allergic reactions to endotoxins, liver damage, bowel diseases and hearing loss.

For too long, workers have put up with anti-union, anti-worker governments that have chopped public health and safety programs, eroded wages and respect for labour rights and given expensive tax breaks and subsidies to the largest corporations.

Farm workers must be given full and equal rights with other workers before any further expansion of the livestock industry takes place.

The danger to public health and the environment

Technological change can be used in agriculture to ensure short-term profiteering for a few operators at the expense of the large majority. Or technological change can be used to open up better prospects that will protect the environment and improve the lives of most people.

In our view, the concentration and centralization of capital investment in Canada's agricultural industries – where profit is the only motivating factor – is creating a serious threat to the health of Canadians and the natural environment.

One of the most fundamental problems in agriculture today is that research and development is increasingly dedicated to the short term profit interests of the largest corporations that dominate agricultural life. The scientific community, including in post-secondary educational institutes, is being compelled to serve the private interests of the few rather than the quest for truth and knowledge that will benefit the majority.

This situation calls for much stronger government monitoring and laws to govern livestock production, and a massive investment in basic agricultural research and development uninfluenced by the agricultural monopolies.

Many government decisions that have led to the expansion of the livestock industry were made without serious examination of the long-term consequences. Recent governments, including the present NDP provincial government have made many decisions that directly promote the expansion of the livestock industry; environmental groups have effectively criticized these expensive and destructive decisions.

In particular, government decisions directly to promote the hog industry have benefited only a handful of meat packing plants, a small number of large hog farm operations and some related corporate interests. Many smaller hog farm operators have been bankrupted by these decisions and market conditions in recent years. These decisions have endangered the environment and the health of people, and have created unacceptable conditions for workers.

A wide range of environmental, health and safety concerns need to be resolved, including the purity and safety of ground and surface waters, the safety and location of rendering facilities, the spread of disease to workers and the public, the dangers associated with agents used to control disease, the use of hog manure as fertilizer, odour and serious air pollution dangers, animal welfare, and the impact on alternative economic activities.

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It is time for broad and radical changes that will place food production on an entirely different basis, changes that will end the domination of multinational corporations that dominate the agriculture industry and ensure that people and nature are placed before profit in the food industry. A comprehensive agrarian program is required that puts working people before profit and satisfies the real needs of Canadians.

As a starting point, we call on the Manitoba government to give full rights to farm workers and to strengthen and enforce strict rules for the livestock industry. Until this is done, we call for a moratorium on the expansion of the livestock industry in Manitoba.

Full rights for farm workers and defend the family farm

- Extend full labour rights to farm workers
- Curb corporate-monopoly pricing on farm inputs
- Re-establish single-desk selling of hogs; support Wheat Board single-desk selling for more products; restore and strengthen all farm commodity marketing boards
- Price subsidies and strengthened farm income stabilization programs
- Restore regulation of grain delivery in the interests of farmers
- A special meat-packing plant tax to pay for the expensive subsidies to the industry; reveal full details of the agreements between meat packing plants that have received subsidies in the recent period and the provincial and civic governments
- Public ownership and democratic control of the banks and agri-corporations

Put people and nature before profit

- Strengthen environmental laws and educational programs; increase penalties for corporate polluters; provincial control of all water drainage rights
- Strengthen and coordinate federal and provincial monitoring and laws related to agriculture and food processing, especially labour standards, health, safety and environmental monitoring and regulation
- End corporate intrusion into and increase funding for agricultural and food production research and development at post-secondary institutes
- End private monitoring of agriculture and food operations; ban water quality monitoring user fees
- Comprehensive land-use planning

NOTES

*S. 3(1) of the Minimum Wage and Working Conditions Regulation, Employment Standards Code

**Calculated using an arbitrary figure of twelve weeks wages per worker from a total of 146,805 weeks of wages paid on 7,430 farms. Farmers were asked in the 1995 census to report the number of weeks paid, but not the duration of the week; the average weekly hours for employees in Manitoba excluding agricultural and a few other categories of workers in 1999 was 30.1 hours.