

June 17, 2020

Honourable Bill Morneau
Minister of Finance
90 Elgin St.
Ottawa, Ontario K1A 0G5

Honourable Marie-Claude Bibeau
Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food
1341 Baseline Road Tower 7, Floor 9, Room 149
Ottawa, Ontario K1A 0C5

Dear Ministers,

Re: Financial aid for animal agriculture industry

As Canadians, businesses, and non-profit groups across the country grapple with the devastating public health and economic consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic, public funds should be directed strategically to help those in need while also advancing long-term public objectives, such as preventing the next global pandemic and putting Canada on track to a future marked by economic, social, and environmental resilience and sustainability. We urge you to ensure federal emergency funding for the agricultural sector supports these objectives.

The COVID-19 pandemic has exposed serious problems with Canada's food system and supply chains, particularly in the meat industry. Policy regarding the use of \$252 million in initial emergency funding for the agricultural sector, as well as any future funding provided, should be designed to fix these problems and promote environmental sustainability and social equity, rather than enabling a return to "business as usual". Canada's response to the COVID-19 pandemic should ensure that we emerge from this crisis stronger and more resilient, respectful of the interconnectedness of human, environmental, and animal health.

Federal funding should protect people, the environment, and animals, not large corporations

The challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic are being experienced across the agricultural sector in many different ways. Workers, small and mid-size independent farmers, and animals are suffering disproportionately from these impacts. Federal emergency funds and programs should be focused on supporting these groups, rather than large multi-million or -billion dollar companies. Federal funding decisions should be guided by the following principles:

1. **Climate compatibility:** Funding should be used to build a climate-compatible food system that promotes a healthy environment for all.
2. **Respect for workers' rights:** One of the main weaknesses in our existing food system is its heavy dependence on low-wage workers who come predominantly from racialized and

other marginalized communities. Workers in the agricultural and food processing sector should earn a living wage and have adequate protection from injury and illness.

3. **Animal welfare:** Public funds should go to farmers and producers whose practices are consistent with Canadians' increasing concern with the welfare of animals.
4. **Financial need:** The allocation of federal emergency funds should be based on financial need and the objective of transitioning Canada to a resilient and sustainable food production system, and not the lobbying prowess of a given industry.

Our specific requests with respect to the use of public funds to assist the agricultural sector in managing the challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic are as follows:

First, public funds and policies should primarily be directed to farmers of climate-compatible, plant-based crops such as fruits, vegetables, mushrooms, grains, beans, nuts, and seeds. Meat and dairy production are the biggest agricultural sources of greenhouse gas emissions from the agricultural sector.¹

Commonplace industrialized farming practices take a heavy toll on the environment, due to the use of vast quantities of pesticides,² monoculture feed cropping,³ and heavy reliance on fossil fuels.⁴ Industrial livestock operations are particularly unsustainable, using huge quantities of freshwater while emitting significant pollution to air and water.⁵ Soil erosion and biodiversity loss are also caused by industrialized farming practices, including in the livestock sector in particular.⁶

Although the meat and dairy industries are known for their significant lobbying resources and expertise, other parts of the agricultural sector are in need of significant assistance. For instance,

¹ Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) "Special Report on Climate Change and Land" (2019). Online: <https://www.ipcc.ch/srccl/>.

² See, e.g. Michalak, et al, 2013, "Record-setting algal bloom in Lake Erie caused by agricultural and meteorological trends consistent with expected future conditions," Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences of the United States of America, Vol. 10, no. 16, pp 6448 to 6452; D.W. Schindler et al., 2012, "The rapid eutrophication of Lake Winnipeg: Greening under global change," Journal of Great Lakes Research, Vol. 38, Supplement 3, pp 6 to 13.

³ See, e.g. Marcelo A. Aizen et al., 2019, "Global agricultural productivity is threatened by increasing pollinator dependence without a parallel increase in crop diversification," Global Change Biology, Vol. 25, no. 10, pp 3516-3527.

⁴ Jeremy Woods et al., 2010, "Energy and the food system," Philos Trans R Soc Lond B Biol Sci. 365(1554), pp 2991–3006.

⁵ J. Poole & T. Nemecek, 2018 "Reducing food's environmental impacts through producers and consumers," Science 360 (6392) 987-992.

⁶ See, e.g. Brian Machovina et al., 2015 "Biodiversity conservation: The key is reducing meat consumption," Science of the Total Environment, Vol. 536 pp 419-431.

mushroom growers in Canada are reportedly losing up to \$400,000 per week due to lost revenues from restaurants.⁷

Second, we request that public funds be used to support independent small and mid-size farmers and communities, and not large multinational corporations. This includes supporting Indigenous food producers and the application of essential Indigenous knowledge through Canada's food system.

Much of the weakness in Canada's food supply chain that has been exposed by the COVID-19 pandemic is due to significant corporate concentration. Canada's meat industry in particular is controlled almost entirely by four multi-billion dollar corporations: Cargill, JBS S.A., Maple Leaf, and Olymel. This extreme consolidation is a threat to our food system, as well as rural economies, and leaves supply chains vulnerable to unexpected disruptions in the future.

With respect to the \$77.5 million in funding already announced by the government to retrofit and increase production at slaughterhouses and other food processors, multi-billion dollar companies such as JBS, Cargill, Olymel, and Maple Leaf can, and should be expected to, provide adequate protections for workers, including access to personal protective equipment, a working environment conducive to social distancing and good personal hygiene, and paid leave to ensure they do not work when sick with COVID-19 or other illnesses. These multi-billion dollar companies do not need a public bail-out.

Third, no public funds should be given to intensive livestock operations or "factory farms", including slaughterhouses. Intensive livestock operations use vast and unsustainable quantities of freshwater resources and are the source of significant air and water pollution.⁸ As the COVID-19 pandemic has shown, these facilities are known for providing dangerous and precarious working conditions. Workers, who predominantly come from marginalized communities, face high risks of injury, illness, and mental distress due to the conditions of their work.⁹

The welfare of animals at intensive livestock operations, who are confined by the thousands in unsanitary conditions, is significantly compromised. Hundreds of thousands of animals across the country are now at risk of being culled on farms by means including being gassed or electrocuted. In addition to causing animal suffering, such practices also result in significant

⁷ See, e.g. Jeremy Simes, "Mushroom farmers face steep COVID-19 losses", The Western Producer. Online: <https://www.producer.com/2020/05/mushroom-farmers-face-steep-covid-19-losses/>.

⁸ M.M. Mekonnen & A.Y. Hoekstra, 2010, "The green, blue, and grey water footprint of farm animals and animal products" UNESCO-IHE Institute for Water Education. Online: <https://waterfootprint.org/en/water-footprint/product-water-footprint/water-footprint-crop-and-animal-products/>.

⁹ See, e.g. Jean Lian, 2013, "Silence on the floor," OHS Canada. Online: <https://www.ohscanada.com/features/silence-on-the-floor/>.

waste of animal products.¹⁰ The Canadian government should reject the Canadian Pork Council’s request that funds not be tied to “inventory depopulation decisions.”

Industrial animal agriculture is also a serious threat to public health. The overuse of antibiotics at these facilities is contributing to the rise of antibiotic resistance in humans.¹¹ They are also breeding grounds for potential new zoonotic diseases because thousands of genetically similar animals with compromised immune systems are kept confined in unsanitary conditions. Indeed, deadly strains of avian and swine flu have emerged from intensive livestock operations in the past and scientific experts agree that they could be the source of the next global pandemic.¹²

Intensive livestock operations should not receive public funds and indeed, should be phased out in line with the Food Policy for Canada objective of developing a food system that is resilient and innovative, and environmentally and economically sustainable. Toward this end, public funds should be used to help farmers transition out of the factory farm model, and to support the expansion of sustainable, plant-based agriculture.

We also request that the government uphold existing environmental, public health, and labour laws and reject any requests to loosen or cease enforcing these legal requirements during the pandemic. Any weakening of these laws would be short-sighted and risk undermining Canada’s efforts to ensure our recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic puts us on track for a resilient, equitable, and sustainable future.

Finally, any agricultural funding provided by the federal government should be directed to rebuilding and growing local, safe, sustainable plant-based food systems that are more resilient and will improve food security, the health of Canadians, worker safety, and the environment on which we all depend.

Toward a sustainable and resilient future for Canada’s food system

When the COVID-19 pandemic is over, one of our most important tasks as a country will be to examine our own practices and ensure that the next global pandemic does not begin within our

¹⁰ Sylvain Charlebois, 2020 “Don’t blame farmers for euthanizing animals and dumping milk. We have the food industry we deserve,” Ottawa Citizen. Online: https://ottawacitizen.com/opinion/charlebois-dont-blame-farmers-for-euthanizing-animals-and-dumping-milk-we-have-the-good-industry-we-deserve/?utm_term=Autofeed&utm_medium=Social&utm_source=Twitter#Echobox=1589521855.

¹¹ United Nations Interagency Coordination Group on Antimicrobial Resistance, 2019, “No time to wait: Securing the future from drug-resistant infections”. Online: <https://www.who.int/news-room/detail/29-04-2019-new-report-calls-for-urgent-action-to-avert-antimicrobial-resistance-crisis>.

¹² J. Otte et al., 2007, “Industrial livestock production and global health risks” Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, Pro-Poor Livestock Policy Initiative Research Report; Council for Agricultural Science and Technology, 2005, “Global Risks of Infectious Animal Diseases” Issue paper 28.

own borders. When it comes to the agricultural sector, this will mean prioritizing the health of ecosystems and supporting farmers producing fruits, vegetables, pulses, whole grains, beans, nuts and seeds, and other climate-compatible plant-based foods, in line with Canada's Food Guide.

Canada urgently needs to build a sustainable, compassionate, resilient, and equitable food system. We urge you to ensure that emergency funding during this pandemic supports this goal by investing in food production systems that are compatible with Canada's climate targets, promote ecosystem health, safeguard our freshwater resources, respect workers, and protect biodiversity.

Yours truly,

Animal Justice

David Suzuki Foundation

Mercy For Animals

Vancouver Humane Society

Environmental Defence

Winnipeg Humane Society

Canadians for Ethical Treatment of Farmed Animals

Plant-Based Canada

Canadian Coalition for Farm Animals

Evolve Our Prison Farms

Humane Society International/Canada

Nation Rising

CC: MP Alistair MacGregor, NDP Critic for Agriculture, Rural Economic Development
MP Peter Julian, NDP Critic for Finance
MP John Barlow, Conservative Critic for Agriculture and Agri-Food
Hon. Pierre Poilievre, Conservative Critic for Finance
Jo-Ann Roberts, Green Party of Canada Interim Leader