



Quebec MP's bill to ease suffering on Canada's highways

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OTTAWA, October 28, 2009: Most Canadians have seen transport trucks filled with farm animals on Canada's highways. What many don't realize is what the animals must endure or how many millions don't survive their journeys. Three prominent Canadian animal welfare groups, Animal Alliance of Canada, the Canadian Coalition for Farm Animals (CCFA) and the World Society for the Protection of Animals (WSPA) are working to protect farm animals during transport, and they are championing MP Alexandra Mendès' Private Members' Bill seeking to improve farm animal transport regulations.

The existing transport regulations, part of the Health of Animals Act, state no limits on how long entire journeys must be, which means that animals are travelling by land, sea and air for days and even weeks. The intervals at which animals being transported must receive food, water and rest are far too long – with devastating consequences for the animals.

Horses, pigs and chickens may be transported up to 36 hours without food, water and rest. Sheep and goats may be transported up to 52 hours without food, water and rest. Cows may be transported up to 52 hours without water and rest and, when combined with other regulations, as many as 81 hours without food. As a result, every year around 3 million animals arrive dead at Canadian slaughterhouses. Another 11 million animals arrive diseased, injured or declared unfit for human consumption.

The Bill amends section 148 of the regulations by reducing transport times for equines, swine and poultry from 36 hours to 8 hours and cattle, sheep, goats and other ruminants from 52 hours to 12 hours.

Animal welfare groups have long been lobbying to update the regulations, and the Canadian Food Inspection Agency has been reviewing them for a decade. The groups are hoping that the bill, tabled by Alexandra Mendès, Member of Parliament for Brossard – La Prairie, will encourage the Canadian government to act swiftly.

Quotes:

"Canada is among the worst, or for certain aspects is the worst, among industrialized nations for animal transport standards." Stephanie Brown, Canadian Coalition for Farm Animals

"People should be aware of what animals go through from farm to slaughter. It is inhumane to deprive an animal of food, water or rest for 81 hours and to subject them to such unhealthy and stressful conditions. Animals experience terror, pain and suffering. If the Minister of Agriculture can alleviate some of this suffering and make our food safer by reducing farm animal transport

times, then this is something he should do. We are grateful to Mrs. Mendes for putting forward a bill that will protect both animals and Canadians.” Karen Levenson, Animal Alliance of Canada

“A 2008 Harris/Decima poll revealed that 75% of Canadians think our maximum allowable transport times are ‘too long’. This is an issue that Canadians care about, and reducing the amount of time animals are transported is the right choice for animal welfare, for the health of Canadians and for our local economies.”Melissa Matlow, Programs Officer, WSPA Canada

“Canadians across the country want to be assured that our farm animals are treated humanely. I am responding to their concerns by tabling a bill that would dramatically reduce the suffering of millions of animals and bring Canada up to European animal welfare standards.” Mrs. Alexandra Mendès, M.P. for Brossard – La Prairie

Key facts:

Horses pigs and chickens may be transported up to 36 hours without food, water and rest, with an additional allowance of a 5-hour pre-transport food withdrawal period.

Sheep and goats may be transported up to 52 hours without food, water and rest, with an additional allowance of a 5-hour pre-transport food withdrawal period.

Cows may be transported up to 52 hours without food, water and rest, with an additional allowance of a 5-hour pre-transport food withdrawal period.

For cows being transported to slaughter, the interval at which food is required can be 81 hours, since the Meat Inspection Act allows that cows may be deprived of food for up to 24 hours.

Because of the conditions in which they are transported, every year around 3 million animals arrive dead at Canadian slaughterhouses. Another 11 million animals arrive diseased, injured or declared unfit for people to eat.

It is common for animals being transported to be subjected to prolonged exposure to the elements, including extreme heat and cold, to be forced to stand or lie in their own waste, and to die from stress-related illnesses.

There is considerable scientific evidence showing that the longer the journey, the more the level of suffering increases, and the animals also become more susceptible to infections and disease, which can lead to diseased meat entering the food chain. This threatens the health and safety of Canadians.

75% of Canadians say the maximum allowable transport times are “too long”. *Harris/Decima poll, January 2008, margin of error is +/-3.1%, sample size n=1,013

The European Food and Safety Authority has recommended that transport be avoided wherever possible and journeys be kept as short as possible.

The UN Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) describes live animal transport as “ideally suited for spreading disease,” given that animals may originate from different herds or flocks and are “confined together for long periods in a poorly ventilated stressful environment.”

Slaughtering animals close to the farm would help stimulate the local economy by retaining more jobs and product value in rural communities.