

## Rodeo plan for Montreal’s 375th stirs controversy

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Opposition is growing to the NomadFest Urban Rodeo, planned as part of the celebrations of Montreal’s 375th anniversary. It is scheduled to take place August 24 to 27 at the Jacques-Cartier Pier in the Old Port.

Twenty-three animal protection groups have spoken out against the event locally, nationally and internationally, including the Montreal SPCA, Vancouver Humane Society, Canadian Coalition for Farm Animals, and Canadian Horse Defense Coalition. More than 600 veterinarians and animal technicians have presented a petition to the City opposing the festival’s animal events.

The Canadian Veterinary Medical Association has stated, “The CVMA accepts the use of animals in entertainment only when the animals’ physical, social and behavioural needs are being met. The CVMA opposes activities, contests or events that have a high probability of causing injury, distress or illness.”

In a letter to Mayor Denis Coderre, veterinarian Jean-Jacques Kona-Boun says the rodeo does not honour Montreal but insults it, because “the rodeo is founded on violence and the stress and fear it engenders in animals.”

Maxime Lefebvre, NomadFest’s producer, has said that rodeo animals can cost up to \$50,000 and when you work with an animal that expensive, “you won’t hurt that beast, you will cherish that beast.”

But Kona-Boun disputes the industry’s claim that rodeo participants keep their animals in good health with a minimal chance of injury. “It is important to understand that a state of good health before the contests, even following a medical examination by a veterinarian, absolutely does not signify that suffering is not inflicted.” Kona-Boun says even the absence of visible injuries does not exclude internal lesions and psychological suffering.

The grocery chain Loblaws has withdrawn its sponsorship in February, saying the event does not reflect its role as a trusted food brand retailer. “The rodeo is not one of the events we are supporting,” a spokesperson said.

The Montreal SPCA says it is “appalled” by the proposed event and disapproves of all rodeo events using animals. “A rodeo is solely for the purpose of entertainment. There is no doubt it causes intense stress, fear and pain to animals,” says Sophie Gaillard, lawyer for the SPCA’s animal advocacy department. “We are completely outraged that this is happening in Montreal.”

The Montreal SPCA has drafted a statement against the rodeo events at Festival Western de St- Tite, charged with running the NomadFest rodeo.

“We are firmly opposed to the rodeo that is part of the Festival Western de St-Tite. Rodeo events (which include the calf roping event – where calves are lassoed by their legs and thrown to the ground) subjects the animals to unnecessary stress and suffering for the pure purpose of so called ‘entertainment.’” Calf roping is not part of the planned Montreal rodeo but is a staple of the yearly festival.

Coderre defends the proposed rodeo on the grounds that it is entrusted to the experts who run the Festival Western St. Tite for whom, he says, animal well-being is a priority.

Six rodeo events are scheduled for the festival, including bareback bronc riding, saddle bronc riding, bull riding, barrel race, rescue race, and exchange rider race.

The festival organizers says that events will enable visitors of all ages “to be immersed in the world of country in an urban setting.” It plans to erect a reconstructed interactive village with a general store, barber shop, and country, bluegrass, and folk music, and a dancefloor.