

Local farmers discuss Bill 156 with government officials

Written By PAULA BROWN

LOCAL JOURNALISM INITIATIVE REPORTER

Dufferin-Caledon farmers and agribusinesses joined government officials last week (Sept. 8) for a roundtable to consult on a provincial bill addressing food safety and trespassing on farm property.

Dufferin-Caledon MPP Sylvia Jones and Ontario Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs Ernie Hardeman met with several local community farmers and agribusinesses to discuss the regulations with Bill 156, also known as Security from Trespass and Protecting Food Safety Act 2020, and receive feedback on the proposed regulations.

"Their input helps the Minister to clearly define the provisions that will be included in the regulations," said Jones. "This is necessary to reduce the risks posed to on-farm trespass and to better protect Ontario's animals and food supply chain."

Bill 156 looks to address the concerns from farmers on food safety, biosecurity and feelings of being unsafe in their own homes created by trespassers.

"I think all Canadians, all Ontarians want safe food, a safe food system, and want animals treated humanely and we don't want, whether we're livestock producers or farmers or normal citizens, people trespassing on our property," said Bill McCutcheon, President of Dufferin Federation of Agriculture (DFA), "This bill, this act kind of talks to all those things."

As a sheep farmer in Monticello, Ont., Bill McCutcheon hasn't personally experienced trespassers releasing his animals, but he has experience trespassing by different vehicles, damaging his crops.

"It's not just our business, it's where we live and it can be quite traumatic," said McCutcheon.

In the consultation one part of Bill 156 that was looked at was the defining of "animal zones", which McCutcheon says would primarily focus on barns and some outside yards

"In the legislation if you're attacked or demonstrators pass into that animal zone then they're going to be charged," said McCutcheon, who also says the Bill gives more "teeth" and authority over the Trespassers Act.

Another part of Bill 156 for farmers is the biosecurity or the measures that are taken to minimise viruses and bacteria.

"Just like the public is battling with a virus right now, we in the livestock industry, we battle with viruses and bacteria all the time, we want to keep them off our farms," said McCutcheon. "We don't want people bringing them in on their tire, or shoes, or in their lungs and contaminating our livestock, we don't want our livestock to be sick, we want them to be healthy and productive. Biosecurity is huge on livestock farms."

Nearly 130 municipalities have passed or supported council resolution calling on the government to strengthen protections for farm families, employees, and animals.

"Our government will always stand with Ontario's agri-food heroes who work hard every day so that food remains on grocery store shelves and family dinner tables especially at this challenging time," said Minister Hardeman.

"We do have a lot of non-agriculture, non-farmers visiting our community and frankly I think some of them don't understand that just because the land looks like there's nothing growing in it that's definitely not the case," said MPP Jones.

Written submissions on the provisions of the Act are being accepted until Oct. 15 and can be sent to Ontario's Regulatory Registry.

?We want to make sure that the public is safe, that the public has safe wholesome food and we want to work together with the public to do that,? said McCutcheon. ?That we produce food in a sustainable and humane way and that our businesses are protected.