

Sustaining the Animal Agricultural Industry through Ag-Gag Laws: Counterproductive Measures to Flourishing Lives

Stephanie Eccles, MSc, PhD student
Department of Geography, Planning & Environment
Concordia University

ANIMAL AGRICULTURE INDUSTRY AND ITS ENDURING HARM

A growing concern is emerging that the animal agricultural industry (AAI) as a food system is not given “proportional attention” in sustainability and climate change research¹. Research continues to show the accumulation of environmental, social and animal welfare implications. According to the most recent FAO statistics, AAI globally contributes 14.5% of Global House Gas emissions with the projection that the industry will increase by 70% as of 2050 to support population growth and food preferences². The working conditions include exposure to contaminants and have the highest rate of injuries for all sectors further exasperating the already marginalized status of the workers³. Compounding the socio-economic harm, the AAI is responsible for killing over 70 billion land animals each year².

WHAT ARE AG-GAG LAWS?

Ag-gag laws restrict the flow of information (visual media and other materials) about farm facilities by deterring and criminalizing such violations. First introduced in 1990 by the American Legislative Exchange Council a non-governmental organization that advocates and forecasts threats for big business⁴. Ag-gag laws are characterized as criminalizing:

- recording on farms without consent^{3,4,10}
- trespassing onto animal protection zones^{3,4,10}
- seeking employment under false pretense^{3,4,10}
- reporting illegal activities³
- comprising biosecurity of farmed animals³
- committing economic sabotage¹⁰

CANADIAN CONTEXT AND AG-GAG LAWS

In the past year concerned Canadian’s have organized several farm occupation’s with various demands such as the media be invited to tour the facility or animals be liberated. Each non-violent action was connected by the goal to expose the AAI to the public with the intention to “indict the entire [food] system as one that is based on acts of cruelty and unsafe practices”⁵. Figures (1-4) exemplify the battle over how animal agriculture is visualized. The Canadian government has responded by introducing ag-gag laws. Table (1) provides a brief introduction of the 3-current ag-gag laws.



Figure 1: A snapshot from King Cole's Duck Farm in Whitchurch-Stouffville, Ontario⁹



Figure 2: Photo taken from inside the King Cole Duck Farm on February 18th, 2020. Source: Shay Lee.



Figure 3: Porgreg Farm in Saint-Hyacinthe, Quebec. Source: Shay Lee.

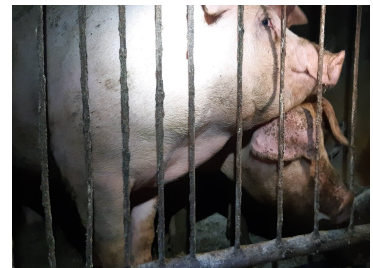


Figure 4: Two pigs inside Porgreg Farm taken on December 7th, 2019. Source: Cassey Phaneuf

Ag-gag Legislation	Highlights
Bill 27 Trespass Statutes (Protecting Law-abiding Property Owners) Alberta, Canada Status: Royal Assent 11/29/19	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 1st offence fine not exceeding \$10,000, or imprisonment for a term not exceeding 6 months, or both⁶ • 2nd offence fine not exceeding \$25,000, or imprisonment for a term not exceeding 6 months, or both⁶ • in the case of a corporation, a fine not exceeding \$200,000⁶
Bill 156 An Act to protect Ontario's Farms and Farm Animals from trespassers and other forms of interference and to prevent contamination of Ontario's food supply Ontario, Canada Status: Standing committee 03/09/2020	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 1st offence fine of not more than \$15,000; 2nd offence not more than \$25,000⁷ • seeking employment under false pretence pretense⁷ • anyone working for a farm has the power to arrest with use of necessary force⁷ • spatially expands the ‘animal protection zone’ to include interference with a motor vehicle transporting farm animals⁷
Bill C-205 An Act to Amend the Health of Animals Act Canada Status: First reading 02/18/2020	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • criminal conviction to be determined case-by-case⁸ • fine not exceeding \$500,000⁸

THE ISSUES OF AG-GAG LAWS: A SUSTAINABLE FUTURE CONCERN

- 1) They grant the AAI special protection to criminalize obtaining critical knowledge of the industry itself which can prevent:
 - a) food safety recalls³
 - b) workers reporting occupation health and safety issues³
 - c) animal welfare violations¹⁰
 - d) sustainable policies to improve workers and animal welfare³
- 2) Gives legal permission to further the egregious harm to the environment, humans and animals without accountability^{1,2,3}
- 3) Override constitutional rights of individuals¹⁰
- 4) Perpetuate the concealment of animals' lives and depoliticizes their existence as “food” sources²
- 5) Criminalizes dissent through massive fines and imprisonment¹⁰
- 6) Can be broadly applied to criminalize whistleblowers in other sectors^{3,10}



Figure 5: A part of the series ‘Censored Landscapes’ by Isabella La Rocca González. 600,000 egg-laying hens are captive¹¹.

References:
¹ Arcari, P. (2017). Normalized, human-centric discourse of meat and animals in climate change, sustainability and food security literature. *Agriculture and Human Values* 34: 69-86.
² Bergmann, I. M. (2019). Interspecies sustainability to ensure animal protection: Lessons from the thoroughbred racing industry. *Sustainability* 11(5):390: 1-30.
³ Cayes, C. & Healey, D. C. (2019). Ag-Gag Laws: Evolution, Resurgence, and Public Health Implications. *New Solutions: A Journal of Environmental and Occupation Health Policy* 29(4): 664-682.
⁴ Rasmussen, C. (2015). Pleasure, pain, and place: Ag-gag, crush videos, and animal bodies on display. In R. Collard & K. Gillespie (Eds.). *Critical animal geographies* (pp. 54-70). New York: Routledge.
⁵ Broad, G. M. (2016). Animal production, ag-gag laws, and the social production of ignorance: Exploring the role of storytelling. *Environmental Communication* 10(1): 43-61.
⁶ Bill 27, *Trespass Statutes (Protecting Law-abiding Property Owners) Amendment Act*, 1st Sess, 43rd Parl, Alberta, 2019 (Royal Assent November 29th, 2019).
⁷ Bill 156, *An Act to protect Ontario's farms and farm animals from trespassers and other forms of interference and to prevent contamination of Ontario's food supply*, 1st Sess, 42nd Leg, Ontario, 2020 (committee stage).
⁸ Bill C-205, *An Act to Amend the Health of Animals Act*, 1st Sess, 43rd Parl, Canada, 2020 (committee stage).
⁹ King Cole Ducks. “A Farm to Table Story”. Youtube, uploaded by King Cole Ducks, October 2015, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CI4isDuMewE>
¹⁰ Potter, W. (2017). Ag-gag laws: Corporate attempts to keep consumers in the dark. *Griffith Journal of Law & Human Dignity* 5(1): 1-32.
¹¹ Censored Landscapes. (n.d.). “Censored Landscapes”. Retrieved from: censoreddeslandscapes.org