

## Animal Welfare Disaster in Ontario

In what must be considered an animal-welfare disaster involving many thousands of pigs in multiple locations across south-western Ontario, a total of 77 animal cruelty charges under the Criminal code of Canada have now been laid against seven men.

In an Ontario SPCA investigation at a pig farm in Elgin County, operated by Wood Lynn Farms Limited, it quickly became apparent to investigators that not only were the conditions of both the facility and the animals of extreme concern, but also that the problems could extend through multiple locations of Wood Lynn Farms Limited and associated operations in Southwestern Ontario.

This was indeed found to be the case, and Ontario SPCA Inspectors and Agents from right across the province were called to deal with thousands of animals, many of which were dead or dying. The 77 charges relate to five of the locations.

Ontario SPCA investigators found:

- Heaps of dead pigs piled behind barns
- Thousands of dead piglets in manure tanks
- Dead piglets being eaten by rodents
- Dead pigs throughout many of the facilities in various stage of decomposition
- Sows giving birth amongst other pigs, resulting in piglets being trampled and eaten by adults
- Extensive cannibalization

Many pigs were in such poor conditions that they had to be euthanized immediately. On arrival at one location, a Wood Lynn Farms Limited contractor was seen attempting to kill a pig by beating it with a metal pipe.

The inspectors found filthy and wet conditions in many areas, as well as inadequate food, water and bedding.

Those charged as a result of the investigation are: James R. Long of London, ON; Ryan Long of London, ON; Kevin McHardy of Lambeth, ON; Martin Dewild of Wyoming, ON; George Kahiri of London, ON; Victor Aideyan of London, ON; and John Bazilli of Waterford, ON.

Many groups and concerned members of the public are demanding an enquiry to determine how this situation could have existed without either the Ontario Ministry of Agriculture and Food, and/or the Ontario SPCA intervening at a much earlier stage – and long before the thousands of pigs died. The “Ontario Farm Animal Council” admitted that they had received a complaint about the conditions but after placing ‘several’ calls to the operator at the Elgin facility, which were never returned, took no further action.

This sad, tragic incident highlights the weakness of the present arrangement between the Ontario SPCA and the Ontario Farm Animal Council (OFAC) under which farmers are encouraged to report farm animal abuses anonymously to the OFAC who, in turn, will pass the details of the complaint to the Ontario SPCA. The theory is that ‘county folk’ don’t like ‘informing’ on their neighbours to the OSPCA or the police, but don’t mind doing so anonymously to a ‘farmers’ group’!

Obviously this 'arrangement' may well set certain elements of the animal farming community above the law. If an animal farmer was seen to be breaking the law by, say, robbing a bank, would his neighbours phone the Salvation Army? Not a fair comparison perhaps but getting close to the reality of the existing arrangement in which members of the farming community are encourage not to report animal cruelty or neglect directly to the police or the Ontario SPCSA.