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The Facts and Fiction of Food

Exposing the Origin and Influence of Agriculture Front Groups in Canada



ANIMAL JUSTICE

About This Report

Manipulating consumer opinion and public policy through the creation of "front groups" is one of the most common public relations strategies employed by controversial industries. This report investigates the origins, goals, and influence of these organizations within Canada's animal agriculture sector, revealing a systematic effort to shield industrial practices from public accountability and government oversight.

Key objectives:

- **Trace the Influence:** Demonstrate how front groups and marketing agencies manipulate public discourse, secure government funding, and capture the regulatory processes intended to advance animal welfare.
- **Expose the Playbook:** Identify the key players and detail the deceptive tactics and communications strategies imported from the United States to control the narrative of Canadian animal agriculture.
- **Challenge the Status Quo:** Inform journalists, advocates, and policymakers of the hidden agendas stalling meaningful reform, working toward a more transparent and accountable food system with government oversight.

About Animal Justice

ANIMAL JUSTICE

Animal Justice is Canada's leading animal law and advocacy organization. Our mission is to lead the legal fight for animals in Canada. We work to improve Canada's outdated animal protection laws, expose secretive, cruel, and unlawful conditions on Canadian farms through investigations and publicity, push to hold industries accountable for harming animals, and fight on behalf of animals in court. Our aim is to create legal, social, and corporate policy change for animals in Canada.

Prepared by Dr. Elizabeth Schoales and PJ Nyman

Photo credit: Victoria de Martigny, We Animals (Quebec)

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Executive Summary

The animal agriculture industry in Canada is facing a public relations crisis. With the decades-long rise of intensive farming practices aimed at lowering costs and increasing production, the cramped and factory-like conditions animals endure on modern farms are now at odds with Canadian values and consumer expectations. The public has become increasingly critical of the industry and its practices, and has demanded change. This challenge, which the industry refers to as a "public trust" crisis, is a predictable consequence of years of poor practices and systemic failures.

Since taking shape in the 1980s, the animal advocacy movement has been instrumental in shining a light on poor animal welfare on modern farms. Over the past 15 years, undercover investigations, public protests, corporate pressure campaigns, and the emerging field of animal law have revealed both the legal and illegal suffering of animals in Canadian agriculture. Alongside growing awareness of Canada's lack of legal protection for animals used in agriculture, the rise of social media has made it possible to showcase these abuses to a wider audience with increasing sensitivity to the suffering of animals.

But instead of making meaningful welfare improvements or adapting to meet changing domestic and international expectations, the Canadian animal agriculture industry has adopted propaganda and disinformation tactics from the United States—the same tactics long used by other troubled industries, such as tobacco and fossil fuels, as they fell out of public favour. A highly developed network of marketing organizations and consultants, including some known "front groups," has emerged in Canada to obscure or distract attention from increasingly unpopular agricultural practices. They have effectively influenced government policy and funding, and undermined the animal welfare commitments of Canada's major food companies. Their ultimate goal: protecting industry interests, maximizing profits, and avoiding regulation and litigation.



Photo credit: Andrew Skowron, We Animals (Quebec)

List of Abbreviations

AAA	Animal Agriculture Alliance
AITC	Agriculture in the Classroom
CAP	Canadian Agricultural Partnership
CCF	Center for Consumer Freedom
CCFI	Canadian Centre for Food Integrity
CFA	Canadian Federation of Agriculture
CFC	Chicken Farmers of Canada
DFC	Dairy Farmers of Canada
EFC	Egg Farmers of Canada
EQA	Egg Quality Assurance
ESG	Environmental, Social and Governance
F&FC	Farm and Food Care
FPT	Federal, provincial and territorial
GRI	Global Reporting Initiative
HSUS/HWA	Humane Society of the United States/Humane World for Animals
MFA	Mercy for Animals
MFAC	Mercy For Animals Canada
NFACC	National Farm Animal Care Council
NFU	National Farmers Union
OFAC	Ontario Farm Animal Care Council
PETA	People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals
RCC	Retail Council of Canada
S-CAP	Sustainable Canadian Agricultural Partnership
SASB	Sustainability Accounting Standards Board
US CFI	Center for Food Integrity

Part 1:

When the Truth is a PR Problem: The Rise of Agriculture Front Groups in Canada



Photo credit: Gabriela Penela, We Animals

Declining Public Trust in Industrial Animal Agriculture

The Growth of Factory Farms

The industrialization of farming over the past century has dramatically changed Canada's food system. Since the 1950s, the total number of farms has decreased by about 75 percent, while the average farm size has tripled.[1] While most farms are still individually- or family-owned, the vast majority of Canadian farmers work on contract for increasingly consolidated, multi-million dollar agribusinesses. Most of the eggs produced across Canada, for example, are sold under brands owned by just two major egg producers: Burnbrae Farms and L.H. Gray & Sons. By the mid-1960s the average commercial egg flock in Canada surpassed 1,000 hens for the first time.[2] Today, the average Canadian egg farm houses 22,500 hens.[3]

By definition, most Canadian farms today are factory farms—large-scale industrial agricultural operations where animals are raised using intensive methods to maximize production and lower costs. As a result, the total number of animals killed for food every year has increased significantly from 45 million in the 1950s, to over 863 million today.[4] This 19.2-fold increase in the number of animals slaughtered vastly outpaced Canada's 2.8-fold human population growth over this period,[5][6] reflecting a massive shift in per capita consumption and the scale of industrial farming. The growth of industrial conditions on farms since the 1950s has led to poor animal welfare and labour practices, heavy pesticide use, environmental degradation and climate change, and threats to food safety and affordability.



Photo credit: Ira Moon, We Animals (Canada)



Photo credit: Jo-Anne McArthur, We Animals

The Absence of Regulation and Oversight

Despite our national reputation for kindness and progressive values, Canada lacks comprehensive federal legislation or a dedicated government framework for farmed animal welfare.[7] There are no legal standards protecting the daily welfare of animals on farms, including requirements related to space, sunlight, air quality, or veterinary care. In the absence of clear, statutory standards and government oversight, the industry has been allowed to create its own "standards" of animal treatment. This has been done via the National Farm Animal Care Council (NFACC),[8] an industry-led, non-governmental body primarily reflecting industry interests, which develops non-binding "codes of practice" for most species of animals used in agriculture.[9] These codes are the basis of additional "animal care" programs developed by national marketing agencies.

Because of this regulatory vacuum, cruel practices that defy the majority of scientific consensus and go against both public sentiment and internationally established best practices remain in place in Canada. For example, the Pig Code explicitly permits blunt force trauma—commonly known as "thumping"—as an acceptable killing method for piglets. This is commonly done either by swinging the piglet by the back legs and striking their cranium against a hard surface, or striking their head with a heavy blunt instrument.[10]

What's Hidden from Public View

Without government oversight, the animal agriculture industry lacks accountability and transparency. What little information the Canadian public has learned about the cruel and harmful aspects of modern farming practices has largely come from investigations and public awareness efforts by whistleblowers, advocates, NGOs, journalists, and other media.

In an attempt to stop this flow of information to the public, the agriculture industry has lobbied intensely for legislation that restricts public and media access to farms and other agricultural facilities, and imposes excessive penalties on whistleblowers and advocates that work undercover at farms or slaughterhouses to expose animal abuse. These laws, commonly known as agricultural gag laws, or "ag gag" laws, have been passed in a number of provinces in Canada.[11]

Rising Public Awareness and Demands for Change

Despite the industry's efforts to maintain secrecy around its worst practices, the public has become increasingly aware of the realities. With easier access and the ability to share information quickly and widely through social media, many Canadians have become familiar with the concept of the factory farm in a relatively short period of time.

Importantly, what is documented inside these facilities runs counter to consumer expectations, Canadian values, and the comforting imagery and messaging used in industry marketing. Time and time again, undercover exposés reveal systemic abuses on Canadian farms[12]— filthy conditions, painful mutilations without pain relief, extreme confinement, and selective breeding for unnaturally rapid growth. Evidence often shows illegal cruelty including kicking, beating and tormenting animals.

New awareness of these practices has mobilized those concerned with how animals are treated in the agricultural system to demand change, transforming farmed animal welfare into a widely recognized social and political issue. Today, a significant majority of the country wants stronger protections for animals.

The more that Canadians have learned about industrial farming practices and their impact on animals, workers, and the environment, the more they have come to distrust "Big Agriculture"— a term popularized in the 1990s in response to growing public awareness of the corporatization of today's food system.

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These values, in contrast to current practices on Canadian farms, have compelled consumers, whistleblowers, lawyers, journalists, advocates, and NGOs to demand better conditions. From undercover exposés that reveal lawful and unlawful animal cruelty, to legislative proposals and corporate pressure campaigns, Canadians from across the political spectrum have been organizing and advocating for stronger protections and oversight for farmed animals.

On the consumer side, rising public awareness of farming conditions has helped fuel significant growth of plant-based foods and interest in products marketed as organic, local, sustainable, or humane. Canadians care about where their food comes from and many are willing to pay more for higher quality and better animal welfare when given accurate information, while preferring that companies adopt higher standards as the default.[13]

- A 2023 Research Co. survey found that **43 percent of Canadians trust agricultural groups and just 33 percent trust corporations.**[14]
- 8 out of 10 Canadians surveyed support a national **ban on cage confinement** for laying hens.[15]
- More than 9 out of 10 Canadians believe it is important that animals have their **basic physical and psychological needs met.**[16]
- More than 9 out of 10 Ontarians surveyed think that **oversight and transparency** concerning the conditions for animals at farms are important.[17]

The Industry's Loss of Narrative Control

Despite its best efforts, the industry has struggled to control the flow of new evidence and media coverage of poor farming practices that challenge traditional marketing images of little red barns, small family farms, and contented cows in sunny fields.[18] It has, in its own words, been losing control of the narrative around modern agriculture.[19]

This has created a public relations crisis for the agriculture industry. Many industry leaders have recognized that consumer rejection of modern farming practices threatens their bottom line. Whether it is new laws, corporate Environmental, Social and Governance policies (ESG), or enforceable codes of practice, any effort at regulation challenges the exceptionalism that has historically justified the Canadian agricultural sector's avoidance of standard labour, environmental, and animal welfare considerations.

Social License and Public Trust

The agriculture industry's response to this public relations crisis has been to attempt to retake control of the narrative, using many of the PR tactics of other industries facing public backlash. It has adopted the concepts of '**social license to operate**' and '**public trust**' as the framework for these initiatives.

Social license is a term commonly used by sectors that are industrial and extractive, and that have operated with minimal regulation or oversight, such as mining and fossil fuels.[20] It refers to what these sectors perceive to be a tacit agreement with the public to operate without restrictions or interference. It is seen as essential for maintaining profit margins and preserving the freedom to operate without public accountability.

Public trust is necessary in order for a sector to maintain its social license. When the public loses faith in an industry to do the right thing voluntarily, it may result in changes in consumer behaviour, demands for greater regulation, or litigation, threatening the industry's ability to operate unfettered.

Industries facing this threat may engage in campaigns designed to rebuild public trust. Public trust campaigns often claim to offer neutral and expert information designed to educate the public about an industry and its practices. In reality, they are usually run by industry front groups with vested interests and significant budgets, which use PR tactics to convince the public that the industry is well regulated when it is not, or that it can be trusted to operate honestly and ethically without government or public oversight.

> Front groups define **social license** as "the privilege of operating with minimal formalized restrictions (regulation, legislation or market-based mandates) based on maintaining public trust. Social license in the context of agriculture and food refers to a community's acceptance or approval of a supply chain's production and marketing approaches."[21] - Canadian Journey to Social License Public Trust

> "Building **trust** isn't just giving consumers more science, more research or more information. It's about demonstrating leadership and shared values on topics they care about most, such as food safety, quality and nutrition, outstanding animal care and environmental stewardship."[22] - "Trust Model," Center for Food Integrity

The Rise of Agriculture Front Groups

The Front Group Agenda

The fear of regulation, and desire to control the narrative in order to maintain the status quo, are core motivators behind the creation of front groups. Their purpose is to shape public opinion and manufacture consumer acceptance in place of directing investment toward improving conditions.

Front groups use a variety of defensive and deceptive marketing tactics to achieve their purpose. They often present themselves as grassroots organizations with friendly sounding names, claiming to be independent and impartial—a well-documented tactic known as 'astroturfing.' This is designed to obscure the fact that they are funded and directed by the industry, company, or political interest group whose agenda they promote.

Front groups rarely address or seek to improve controversial practices within a sector, but instead focus on marketing and image enhancement to build public trust. While they may claim to do this by promoting dialogue or conversations, they often work to silence and discredit critics. The goal is to displace criticism and negative images with positive narratives that centre around sanitized messages and visuals.

This has long been part of the marketing playbook of fossil fuel, chemical, and tobacco industries. It spread to agricultural marketing groups in the late 20th century in response to rising concerns about genetically modified organisms and pesticides, and in the early 21st century as consumers became more concerned about the animal suffering and environmental devastation inherent in the animal farming industry. It is during this period that agriculture front groups in Canada began to proliferate.



Photo credit: Jo-Anne McArthur, We Animals (Ontario)

The Study of Front Groups and Disinformation Tactics

Agriculture front groups and the disinformation tactics that they use have been the focus of a growing body of study. In 2013, the Center for Food Safety, a US-based nonprofit public interest and environmental advocacy organization, released its report *Best Public Relations that Money Can Buy: A Guide to Food Industry Front Groups.*[23] The report focused on four key propaganda and disinformation tactics that the US agriculture industry has borrowed from the fossil fuel and tobacco industries, particularly the formation of front groups.

"Instead of fixing the myriad problems they've created, the food industry's response is to change the way these problems are talked about, to downplay them, to discredit critics, and otherwise make the problems disappear from the public's eye."
- Best Public Relations That Money Can Buy, Center for Food Safety, 2013.

In 2015, Friends of the Earth, Real Food Media and US Right to Know produced *Spinning Food: How Food Industry Front Groups and Covert Communications are Shaping the Story of Food.*[24] The authors focused specifically on pesticides and GMOs, identifying seven American agriculture front groups that use disinformation tactics to promote these industries.

More recently, studies have examined the agriculture industry's use of disinformation tactics internationally. In 2024, Freedom Food Alliance released *Harvesting Denial, Distractions, & Deception: Understanding Animal Agriculture's Disinformation Strategies and Exploring Solutions.*[25] The report focused on agriculture industries in different countries and their use of disinformation tactics to downplay the impact of animal agriculture on climate change, and obstruct public movement away from animal production and consumption to plant-based food systems.

In the same year, Changing Markets Foundation produced *The New Merchants of Doubt: The Corporate Playbook by Big Meat and Dairy to Distract, Delay, and Derail Climate Change.*[26] The report examined 22 large companies over four continents, including the Canadian dairy company Saputo. It also provided case studies focusing on New Zealand, Italy, Brazil, Australia, the UK, and the UN Food and Agriculture Organisation. As the title suggests, the report focused on three of the most common disinformation tactics that these companies have used: distracting, delaying and derailing.

In 2024, InfluenceMap released *The European Meat and Dairy Sector's Climate Policy Engagement: How the Meat and Dairy Industry is Influencing the EU's Agenda to Reduce the Climate Footprint of Diets and Livestock.*[27] The study examined meat and dairy industry campaigns to obstruct EU policies designed to address the industries' impact on climate change. The report focused on ten companies, including retail and meat and dairy producers, and five industry associations, as well as the tactics and misleading narratives that they use.



Photo credit: Julie LP, We Animals

Front groups commonly use propaganda and disinformation tactics to control public discourse.

- **Deny:** Ignore or contradict facts, evidence, or consensus that doesn't support industry messaging or interests
- **Delay:** Substitute irrelevant or non-existent concerns in place of addressing urgent problems raised by critics
- **Discredit:** Undermine research and policies that are critical of industry practices, and denigrate critics such as activists, journalists, or independent scientists
- **Derail:** Redirect blame to others, often critics, to avoid responsibility for industry problems
- **Distract:** Sidestep addressing problems by promoting positive stories, unrelated practices, or superficial claims

In addition to these primary tactics, front groups commonly rely on **third party allies** to promote their messages and interests by **buying science** and industry-funded "experts," **distribute native advertising** by working with media to produce marketing materials designed to appear as neutral information or news, engage in **fear-mongering about activist activity,** and **gaslight the public and media about the accuracy of activist evidence.**

Center For Food Integrity
www.foodintegrity.org

Founded: 2007

Annual Expenses: $5.5 million (2012)

Mission: "To build consumer trust and confidence in today's food system by sharing accurate, balanced information, correcting misinformation, highlighting best practices that build trust and engaging stakeholders to address issues that are important to consumers."

Activity highlights: The Center for Food Integrity defends factory- and industrial farming practices through its conferences and campaigns. It convenes various meetings and conferences including a "Food Integrity Summit" and a North American Strategy Conference on Animal Agriculture at the McDonald's campus Hamburger University. In 2012, CFI spent $1.3 million on its program, "A New Conversation About Food" to promote conventional agricultural practices.



Organizations such as the Center for Food Integrity have appeared regularly in studies and reports on agriculture front groups such as *Spinning Food* (2015) and U.S. Right to Know.

Front Group Activity

Examples of American Front Group Activity

Studies examining disinformation strategies used by the US agriculture industry have consistently identified several key organizations. Some of these lobby groups are overtly dedicated to silencing and discrediting critics. Animal Agriculture Alliance (AAA), for example, was founded in 1987 to "safeguard the future of animal agriculture," which includes surveillance of activists and tracking animal advocacy activities and campaigns.[28]

Other groups are equally obvious about their industry ties and interests, such as the now defunct Protect the Harvest, whose stated purpose was to "preserve American freedoms" by attacking the Humane Society of the United States (HSUS),[29] now known as Humane World for Animals (HWA).[30]

The Center for Consumer Freedom (CCF) is a rebrand of The Guest Choice Network, which was established in 1996 to oppose smoking bans in restaurants. Its 2002 iteration, CCF, was created with the stated purpose of countering the activities of the HSUS/HWA and People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals (PETA). According to its website, it is fighting for the right to choose in the face of a "growing cabal of activists [that] has meddled in Americans' lives in recent years. They include self-anointed 'food police,' health campaigners, trial lawyers, personal-finance do-gooders, animal-rights misanthropes, and meddling bureaucrats."[31]

Examples of Canadian Front Group Activity

Canadian agriculture front groups downplay the harmful realities of industrial agriculture and standard practices by promoting positive images of the industry, and sharing "good news stories" about farmers, families, and farming.

The growth of front groups, and their focus on building public trust in agricultural systems, are a reflection of the widening gap between what the industry does, and what society considers acceptable.

Farm & Food Care was created in 2012 with the stated purpose of building public trust and consumer confidence in Canada's food system.[32] It aims to do this through highly curated and controlled experiences of modern agriculture designed to give the public a positive impression of the industry.

In 2016, Farm & Food Care played a key role in creating the Canadian Center for Food Integrity to assist in tracking consumer concerns and opinions, and developing messaging for the industry.[35]

Also launched in 2012, Agriculture More Than Ever was an "agvocacy" campaign developed by Farm Credit Canada. Its stated purpose was to advocate for agriculture, to "speak up [and] tell our story before somebody else does."[33] Ag More Than Ever was absorbed by the Canadian Centre for Food Integrity in 2021.[34]

Agriculture in the Classroom, while originally formed in individual provinces, was established on a national level in 2015.[36] It serves as the primary educational arm to deliver the strategic messaging developed by Farm & Food Care and the Center for Food Integrity, effectively embedding industry-friendly narratives into the public education system.

The Road to American Front Group Tactics in Canada

American Front Group Profile: The Center for Food Integrity (US CFI)

Some organizations align closely with the definition of industry front groups by professing to be neutral and independent sources of information. Of these, the **US-based Center for Food Integrity (US CFI)[37] has had the greatest influence in Canada.**

When US CFI was formed in 2007, the Center for Food Safety's legal director, Joseph Mendelson, identified it as a PR group claiming to focus on consumer education as a pretense for greenwashing the industry, promoting self-regulation, and avoiding addressing consumer concerns. Mendelson also stated that US CFI's name was intentionally similar to the Center for Food Safety in order to confuse and distract the public.[38] More recently, US Right to Know has identified US CFI as an industry PR and lobbying group with established ties to major agribusinesses.[39]

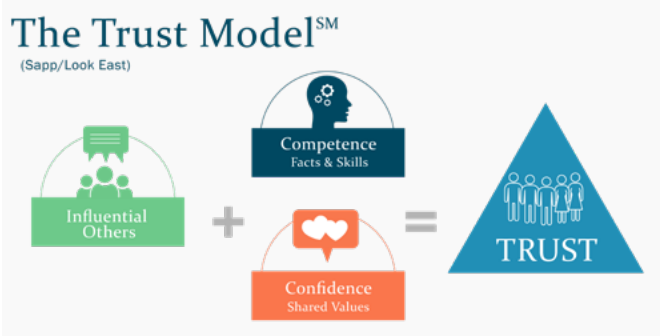
US CFI was founded by its current CEO, Charlie Arnot. Arnot is also the founder and CEO of Look East, a US business specializing in public relations for the agriculture industry.[40] Look East and US CFI share a mailing address in Missouri, and a mandate to help agribusinesses maintain the industry's social license. US CFI's early funders and members included agribusinesses and trade associations such as Monsanto, Elanco Animal Health, the National Pork Board and United Egg Producers.[41] Since then, its directors[42] and members[43] have grown to include companies such as Cargill, Kroger, and CropLife.

Arnot also served as the chair of AAA until 2004[44] and worked with the organization to discredit the Pew Commission on Industrial Animal Production's study of the US animal agriculture system. According to contemporary reports Arnot, AAA and other industry representatives worked together in efforts to thwart and undermine the Commission's work,[45] whose final report, released in 2008, was highly critical of the industry, its practices and lack of adequate regulation.[46]

The "Trust Model"

The concepts of social license and public trust are central to the work of Look East and US CFI. Look East's promise to clients is "helping you grow trust, so you can keep your social license and maintain your freedom to operate."[47] US CFI's website warns that by losing public trust and social license, companies risk "social control, which includes regulations, legislation and litigation designed to compel a company to perform to stakeholder expectations."[48]

In order to help the industry avoid being compelled to perform to public expectations, both Look East[49] and US CFI[50] use what Arnot has dubbed the trust model. The model consists simply of isolating current issues threatening the industry, identifying target audiences and the messaging that works best with them, and finding the most effective influencers and media to get the messaging across. Arnot's model does not recommend communicating with facts and evidence, or critical thought and open debate, but winning audiences over with "shared values," trust of carefully selected "experts," or emotional triggers that make consumers feel they can relate to industry representatives—and therefore trust them.



Source: The trust model.

Part 2:

The Import of US PR Tactics: How Agriculture Front Groups Use Disinformation to Shape Food Policy and Perception



Photo credit: Jo-Anne McArthur, We Animals

The Import of US PR Tactics to Canada

Since founding the US Center for Food Integrity (US CFI) in 2007, Charlie Arnot has written and toured extensively, sharing his public trust model with agricultural organizations both in the US and internationally. Arnot's efforts to establish the US CFI model in Canada included speaking to industry marketing agencies and commodity groups such as the Dairy Farmers of Ontario,[1] the Egg Farmers of Alberta[2] and the Alberta Farm Animal Care's Livestock Care Conference.[3]

Canadian Front Group Profile: Farm & Food Care

US CFI's influence on the Canadian agriculture agenda grew throughout the 2010s as Arnot worked to build relationships with Canadian front groups such as Agriculture More Than Ever[5] and the Ontario Farm Animal Council (OFAC), which would become Farm & Food Care Ontario (F&FC Ontario) in 2012. Leading up to the formation of this group, OFAC's charitable wing, Farm & Food Care Foundation (F&FC Foundation), hosted *Feeding a Hungry World: A Summit for Animal Agriculture* in 2011. The summit addressed what OFAC saw as the urgent need to preserve conventional animal agriculture's social contract with the public by maintaining public support for conventional agriculture and boosting animal agriculture's profile.[6] Following the 2011 summit, the host organizations reported an interest in creating a coordinated and strategic national approach, similar to US CFI, to address growing issues of concern to the industry in Canada.[7]

> **"There is no greater challenge facing the agricultural and food industry than that of earning and maintaining the trust of the consumer."**[4] – John Jamieson, former CEO, Canadian Centre for Food Integrity (CCFI)

The following year, F&FC Foundation partnered with US CFI to host the *North American Forum on Sustainable Animal Agriculture*, intended as a follow-up to the 2011 summit. The purpose was to bring US and Canadian industry representatives together with the stated goal of defining sustainable animal agriculture in a way that supports the industry while building consumer trust. Charlie Arnot provided four presentations.[8] By this point, members of the agriculture sector referred to F&FC Foundation as Canada's counterpart to US CFI.[9]

By 2015, US CFI's concepts of social license and public trust had made it onto the government agenda. That year, Alberta Agriculture and Rural Development and the Agri-Environmental Partnership of Alberta co-hosted the *Social License in Agriculture Conference*.[10] Arnot opened the conference with an introduction to US CFI and its purpose and methods, as well as advice to the Canadian industry on approaching social license and public trust. Advice included using farmers to appeal to consumers, adopting selective messaging "without opening the 'floodgates'" and not getting distracted by the "lunatic fringe."[11]

Other speakers included Alberta's Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development, the Hon. Verlyn Olson, discussing the growing prevalence and importance of social license for the industry, and Kay Johnson-Smith, CEO of Animal Agriculture Alliance (AAA), who focused on AAA's role in tracking animal activists and the need to counter their messages. Other speakers included representatives from McDonald's, Loblaw, and CropLife.

Kim McConnell also participated in the 2015 conference. McConnell founded the agricultural marketing firm AdFarm in 1984, acted as strategic advisor to F&FC, and would become CCFI's first Chair in 2017.[12] At the conference McConnell introduced the still new F&FC. He promoted its value to the industry, informing attendees that it was about to become the home of the new Canadian Centre for Food Integrity, created in partnership with US CFI.

Canadian Front Group Profile: The Canadian Centre for Food Integrity (CCFI)

The Canadian Centre for Food Integrity (CCFI) was established the following year. Its stated purpose was to build on F&FC's longstanding partnership with US CFI by bringing its resources and programs to Canada in order to help the Canadian food system earn trust.[13]

CCFI adopted US CFI's branding and messaging, as well as Arnot's trust model. Its first annual public trust report in 2016 provided an explanation of the model, highlighting the importance of securing public trust in order to maintain social license. It paraphrased US CFI in warning that the alternative is social control, which includes "regulation, legislation or market demands designed to compel the organization to perform to the expectations of its stakeholders." The result for the industry would include increased costs, less flexibility, and increased bureaucratic compliance.[14]

CCFI's backers mirrored those of US CFI, including Monsanto and Dow AgroSciences. Its early funders and supporters also included Canadian agriculture corporations such as Burnbrae Farms, Egg Farmers of Ontario, L.H. Gray and Son Ltd., Maple Leaf Foods, and Alberta Pork.[15] Membership has grown to include organizations such as Bayer (which acquired Monsanto), Cargill, CropLife, Chicken Farmers of Canada, Egg Farmers of Canada, Gray Ridge Egg Farms, Syngenta, BC Salmon Farmers, and Mowi.[16] More recently, CCFI has followed US CFI's playbook by expanding their membership to include major grocery retailers who have been facing approaching deadlines for longstanding public animal welfare commitments.

CCFI	CFI
THE CANADIAN CENTRE FOR FOOD INTEGRITY www.foodintegrity.ca	THE CENTER FOR FOOD INTEGRITY℠ www.foodintegrity.org



 Photo credit: Abigail Messier, We Animals

The Methods: Preparing for Influence

Since its establishment as an extension of US CFI, CCFI has been instrumental in bringing the methods and goals of American agriculture front groups to Canada. Following the strategies used by its US counterpart, CCFI gathers information to identify what issues activists and advocates are raising, and which issues are of concern to the public. It presents this information to industry members through research reports, annual summits, and other topic-specific communications. CCFI also provides its own interpretation of the information it gathers, crafting messaging for the industry to use, and helping industry stakeholders disseminate its messaging in a consistent and targeted way.

Gathering Information

Conducting surveys

One of CCFI's primary activities is conducting annual surveys about topics related to food and agriculture, which it adopted from both US CFI[17] and F&FC. It conducted its first survey in 2016[18] and has conducted one every year since then.

According to CCFI, the purpose of its surveys is to track consumer attitudes over time.[19] Surveys have remained largely consistent, with some variation reflecting emerging issues such as climate change, sustainability, and animal welfare. Participants are not asked for their views, opinions, knowledge, or personal concerns regarding food and agriculture, but rather to rank how concerned they are about topics provided by CCFI.

Although CCFI refers to its surveys as research, they are better described as intelligence-gathering. The purpose is not to conduct critical analysis of collected data or draw supportable conclusions about why the public thinks the way it does about the food system and industrial practices. It is not to identify areas for change within the industry in order to meet public expectations. The purpose is, as CCFI's 2024 report stated, to identify and use what resonates with Canadians in order to "leverage public sentiment and strengthen trust."[20]

Monitoring public conversations

In 2018, CCFI reported that as well as conducting its annual survey, it was also monitoring public conversations to determine current or potential issues of concern to the public regarding food and agriculture. The study tracked online behaviour of 9,200 Canadians over a two year period between 2016 and 2018.[21]

The following year CCFI published *Public Opinion: a Study of Canadian Conversations Online on Food and Farming*.[22] The report provided a summary of the results of a study conducted by the public relations firm Tactix on behalf of CCFI. Tactix used AI software developed by Advanced Symbolics, known for its AI tracking platform "Polly."[23] Using AI, Tactix monitored the social media conversations of over 250,000 Canadians between 2017 and 2019. In its final report, CCFI stated that key topics of public concern at the time were genetically modified foods and climate change. It referred to animal welfare as a "niche" issue, asserting that conversations around this topic were "being greatly magnified by select activist groups and amplified by news media attention." The report provided no further explanation of why it relegated animal welfare to a "niche" topic, what issues related to animal welfare had been discussed in the conversations that were surveilled, or why it considered conversations between animal advocacy groups and members of the public, or media coverage, to be less valid.

In its 2019 annual research report CCFI provided a further summary of its surveillance study. It reported that the AI software was able to identify patterns in conversations and predict how people might react to a certain message. The purpose was to identify archetypes of consumers, understand their main views and characteristics, and identify strategies and communications tactics for connecting with different archetypes. The software provided recommendations on what messaging to use when designing and distributing content that targets specific groups, with the goal of identifying the best messaging to use to shift negative public perceptions to positive ones.[24]

In an interview with *Farmers Forum* that year, Ashley Bruner, CCFI's Research Coordinator at the time, presented a slightly different assessment of the study and its value. She explained that it had helped to identify public conversations that the industry had been unaware of, such as GMOs, and where it needed to "tell agriculture's side." The study had also helped to identify topics, such as animal welfare, where the industry was focusing on the wrong issues. Bruner claimed that one million Canadians talked about animal welfare, but that the industry was focusing on conversations that reflected its own terminology and interests, rather than those of the public. Bruner concluded that the surveillance results confirmed CCFI's tactic of focusing on shared values, stating that "the agricultural community should grab a page from the animal activists' playbook by becoming more emotional and telling personal stories."[25]

Surveillance of advocacy campaigns and activists

Like many agriculture front groups, CCFI tracks the activities of advocacy organizations and provides updates to its members. In 2021 former President and CEO of CCFI, John Jamieson, informed the media that it should not accept the word of activists who report animal abuse because what they say can be biased. Jamieson added that he knew this because CCFI subscribed to a service that monitors activists.[26] It is possible that Jamieson was referring to CCFI's use of the social listening company, Meltwater,[27] which it acknowledged using in 2024.[28]

Members of CCFI, such as the Chicken Farmers of Canada (CFC), openly admit to tracking activist activity. In 2021, for example, CFC published a digital ad in Canadian Grocer noting that it monitors animal activist activity, while also advising companies to consult with CFC before engaging with activists or making changes to their practices.[29] (see Appendix B)

CCFI has kept its membership informed of animal advocacy activity through communications such as its members' newsletter. In 2023, for example, it alerted members about an Animal Justice Academy webinar, Training in Corporate Pressure Campaigns, describing it as "a video that provides insights into the tactics used by animal activists such as Animal Justice to exert pressure on businesses and corporations."[30]

While CCFI has not openly admitted to engaging in surveillance of individual activists, it has a longstanding relationship with AAA, which does. One of AAA's stated purposes is to "identify emerging threats and provide insightful resources on animal rights and other activist groups by attending their events, monitoring traditional and social media and engaging our national network."[31] AAA provides its paid membership with reports on discussions at animal rights conferences,[32] weekly activism updates, and security alerts.[33] AAA is also known to infiltrate animal advocacy organizations in collaboration with state and federal law enforcement agencies,[34] and pass information about individual activists and employees of animal rights charities on to agriculture industry groups.[35] [36]

AAA has a longstanding connection to CCFI, stretching back to its relationship with Charlie Arnot. Key figures in AAA, US CFI, F&FC and CCFI have shared the stage at numerous conferences and events. At AAA's 2023 annual summit, which focused on practical solutions to activist "extremism,"[37] CCFI Consumer Engagement Director and President of Arnot's public relations firm Look East, Roxi Beck, spoke about communications strategies for reaching Gen Z consumers through engaging experiences.[38] Beck spoke again at AAA's 2024 summit, sharing US CFI's insights into building public trust.[39] The theme of AAA's 2026 summit was "High Steaks, Navigating Pressure on Animal Protein." A key focus was learning how to prepare for and recover from animal rights activist critiques,[40] and providing workshops on how to deal with crisis events.[41] Keynote speakers included former CEO of F&FC and former President of CCFI, Crystal Mackay.[42]

CCFI and other industry groups maintain more formal relations with AAA through their memberships and partnerships. AAA itself does not make its membership public, and only provides a membership list to members who pay a minimum of $10,000 USD.[43] However, it does appear on many industry membership and partner lists. For example, the Egg Farmers of Canada identifies US CFI, CCFI and AAA as partners.[44] The National Farm Animal Care Council (NFACC), responsible for establishing codes of practice for animal care on farms (see Part 3), lists AAA as a "useful link" on its members' page.[45] F&FC identifies AAA as a "like-minded" US partner organization alongside its list of members, partners and donors.[46]

Crafting Messages

Working with communications experts

Once CCFI has identified issues that are of current concern to the public, or the focus of advocacy campaigns, it helps industry stakeholders to craft targeted messages around those issues and produce positive images of the industry. Like its US counterpart, CCFI works with public communications and marketing professionals who specialize in creating content and design for the agriculture industry. CCFI's Board of Directors and members have included AgriBiz Communications Corp., AdFarm, and Public Trustworks.[47] [48]

CCFI has worked directly with PR companies such as Public Trustworks, which calls itself "Canada's social licence experts," and claims to have helped the agri-food sector with public relations, crisis communications and issues management before the industry adopted the terms 'social license' and 'public trust.'[49] Another key partner is Crowley + Arklie Strategy & Co., which provides strategic communications services to agri-food businesses. Crowley + Arklie's speciality areas include helping its clients to build public trust in Canada's agriculture and food sector through consumer engagement and training.[50]

Survey reports

Annual survey reports are CCFI's primary way of promoting its messaging to the industry. These reports provide the industry not just with data on the public's responses to pre-selected topics collected each year, but also with CCFI's recommendations on messaging to use around selected topics. These are based on tracking, predictive software, and other surveillance methods, to help craft the best messaging to bring the public around to accepting practices it does not support.

Summits

CCFI releases its survey reports at its annual summits, which are an opportunity to sell itself and what it does to retailers, marketing boards, and other industry stakeholders, encouraging them to become paid CCFI members, and adopt its methods.

CCFI Executive Director, Lisa Bishop-Spencer, has been particularly aggressive in urging industry stakeholders to get behind CCFI and its messaging. At its 2025 summit, Bishop-Spencer regularly advised the audience of industry representatives that they need to be "singing from the same song sheet," adding their voices, and standing together. Although what that song sheet says is not always clear. When asked by a representative of the Egg Farmers of Canada if talking about regulation raises questions that the industry does not want to discuss, Bishop-Spencer advised attendees to talk about their own assurance programs because they help with trust [See Part 3 on industry assurance programs]. Ashley Bruner, now CCFI's Director of Research and Stakeholder Engagement, disagreed, advising that the industry talk about regulations because assurance programs can be too confusing for the public.[51]



Canadian Centre for Food Integrity, 2025 Summit (October 2025).

Disseminating Messages

CCFI has worked to position itself as the central voice for the agriculture industry. The goal is not just to be recognized as the authority on public attitudes towards food and agriculture, but to be the body that dictates how the industry interacts with the public, what it says, and how it says it. CCFI supports industry stakeholders in adopting its messaging by offering training sessions on how to engage effectively with the public.

Encouraging both corporate stakeholders and farmers to use public relations tactics and messaging is common practice throughout the agriculture sector. AAA provides training to college students, or what it calls 'College Aggies', to be positive voices for the animal agriculture industry. Students compete for points and the chance to win prize money.[52] US CFI provides its members with training in how to craft messages and communicate them effectively through its own Engage Training model, as well as workshops focusing on specific issues, and US CFI-moderated consumer panels. Training is designed to help participants to communicate effectively and connect with consumers using shared values, and to build trust.[53]

While it existed, OFAC provided an Agriculture Awareness Toolkit, including how to handle difficult questions and disruptions.[54] F&FC has continued the practice with its Speak Up Training. Participants are not provided with factual information that they can discuss with the public, such as the role of regulation and oversight within the industry, or its standard practices. Training sessions are designed to help farmers adopt public relations tactics, connect with consumers, and present a positive image.[55]

Occasionally, CCFI works with its public relations partners in providing webinars on developing communications strategies. In 2023, it offered "Growing Trust, Protecting Futures: Building Your Public Trust Strategy,"[56] while Public Trustworks provided participants with its own *Building Your Public Trust Strategy* workbook.[57] [58]

Some of CCFI's webinars are open to the public for a fee, such as its 2022 "Animal Welfare & Messaging: from Head-in-the-Sand to Camera Ready." CCFI's guest speaker was Stéphane Beaudoin of Magon Inc., a consultancy firm with the stated mission of promoting humane treatment and animal welfare through consultation and information sharing.[59] Beaudoin's presentation aimed to share best practices for the industry to communicate with the public about its "animal welfare improvement journey."[60]

Building Membership

In 2022, CCFI's President and CEO John Jamieson wrote that building trust includes being transparent and recognizing and improving shortcomings. He added that CCFI produces its annual public trust research and makes it "available for everyone to see on our website."[61] What Jamieson neglected to mention was that CCFI releases highlights of its reports publicly, while only paid members have access to full reports. CCFI membership currently begins at $3,000 a year, extending to $25,000 for large industry corporations and associations, and governmental bodies.[62] Fees are not only restrictive, but demonstrate substantial industry input, and lack of transparency for non-members.[63]

CCFI produces a variety of other materials for its members that are not intended for the public. In 2021, for example, it developed an internal document for members and industry partners in response to the movie *Percy*, dramatizing Monsanto's lawsuit against Canadian farmer Percy Schmeiser. The document advised the industry to monitor the media and social media and plan a staged approach for reactive messaging. It also provided specific messaging to use, including focusing on the fact that Schmeiser had lost in court, as well as the benefits of industry investments, modern technology and genetically modified and engineered crops.[64] CCFI's priority was clearly damage control on behalf of Monsanto, at the expense of individual farmers.

CCFI has also produced ad hoc Insight Reports that focus on controversial issues facing the industry, such as livestock transportation,[65] the use of hormones,[66] cellular agriculture[67] and sustainability.[68] The reports, which CCFI no longer makes public, offer members advice on positive messaging to use in response to concerns that the public may have about these issues.

The Message: From Attacking Activists to Busting Myths and Misinformation

When F&FC launched CCFI, it was open about the fact that CCFI was adopting US CFI's purpose and methods.[69] At its inception, these messages were largely reactive, including crisis management responses to undercover investigations showing animal abuse.

Over time, both US CFI and CCFI have adopted more professional PR tactics in a proactive attempt to distract public attention away from activists and the disturbing realities of animal agriculture, and direct it towards crafted narratives that present positive images of the industry. As Charlie Arnot noted in a 2024 blog for Look East, the old strategy had been for the industry to defend its interests and attack the attackers. When this no longer worked, the strategy shifted to building public trust through information-gathering and positive messaging.[70]

Early Focus: Activists, Exposés and Crisis Management

In response to an increase in undercover investigations in the early 2010s exposing animal abuses in the agriculture industry, US CFI created animal care review panels. The strategy was to assemble a panel and release a report within 48 hours of media coverage in an effort to control the messaging reaching the public.[71] US CFI established its first panel in 2012 in response to footage released by Compassion Over Killing (now Animal Outlook) of abuse at Hawkeye Sow Centers, a pig breeding facility in Leland, Iowa.[72] By 2015, US CFI operated a Pork Panel, Dairy Panel, and a Poultry Panel, as well as a Canadian Pork Panel, with the stated purpose of providing "balanced analysis of undercover video investigations."[73] Panels consisted of selected experts working in various capacities within the animal agriculture industry. According to the American trade magazine Ag Proud, these panels reviewed videos of nine separate investigations.[74]

US CFI brought its review panel model to Canada in 2012 when it established the Canadian Pork Panel[75] following Mercy For Animals Canada's (MFAC) footage showing abuse of pigs at the Puratone farm in Manitoba.[76] The footage, which revealed pigs with open and untreated wounds, piglets being smashed against floors and metal posts, mutilation without anesthetic, and pigs trapped in gestation crates, was covered widely in the media. Panel members reported that most of what the footage revealed was standard industry practice.[77]

In 2013, the Egg Farmers of Canada commissioned US CFI to conduct a review of undercover footage taken at KuKu Farms and Creekside Grove Farms in Alberta.[78] The footage, released by MFAC, exposed appalling conditions at both egg farms,[79] receiving extensive media coverage.[80]

After the Canadian CFI was established, one of its first initiatives was to create its own farm animal care review panel. In 2016, MFAC released footage of cruel practices at Gray Ridge Egg Farms in Ontario.[81] The Egg Farmers of Ontario asked CCFI for a review of the footage,[82] and CCFI launched a panel in partnership with US CFI.[83] In its report, panel members again downplayed animal suffering and described abuses as standard practice.[84]

The purpose of both US CFI and CCFI review panels was not to identify and rectify failures within the animal agriculture system, but to salvage the reputation of the industry in the face of damning evidence. By promoting its panels as science-based bodies, and claiming to provide context, reason and balance to an emotionally-charged subject, CCFI's aim was to cast doubt on organizations providing undercover footage, the footage itself, and the public's reactions.

By claiming to provide context, and regularly concluding that videos showed standard industry practices misunderstood by the public, the implication was that neither the public nor the media was qualified to have an opinion about what they saw. What CCFI did not make clear was that neither it nor its panel members were in a position to provide opinions because they did not have access to complete footage. When it established its first panel in 2012, US CFI optimistically announced that "ideally, the panel will receive complete and in-context video footage from the organization that obtained it." Otherwise edited footage released to the public would have to suffice.[85] Both US CFI and CCFI failed to concede that while complete undercover footage is routinely provided to animal welfare authorities and law enforcement, it is not provided to the industry.

> **"CCFI, a body created by the industry-funded F&FC Canada, is hardly in a credible position to appoint panels to assess allegations against the same industry."**— Peter Fricker, Vancouver Humane Society

US CFI and CCFI may have realized that bringing even further attention to evidence of the abuses within the industry was backfiring, as 2018 appears to be the last year that either organization established an animal care review panel. Their messaging was also out of touch with public sentiment. Admitting that causing pain and suffering was simply standard industry practice, and dismissing valid public outrage as misplaced emotion showed a disregard for legitimate public expectations.

In Canada, the panels were also hurting CCFI's credibility. It only provided review panels to its paid membership, positioning itself as a credible and legitimate public relations resource that members could turn to for help in defending themselves in times of crisis.[86] KuKu Farms, one of the subjects of US CFI's Canadian panel, was a major egg supplier to Burnbrae Farms.[87] Burnbrae was and still is a Gold Member of F&FC Ontario,[88] and CCFI.[89] In 2016, the same year that F&FC established CCFI, and CCFI convened its panel to review the footage of Gray Ridge Egg Farms, that company was also a Gold Member of F&FC Ontario.[90] As the Vancouver Humane Society's Communications Director Peter Fricker pointed out at the time, "CCFI, a body created by the industry-funded F&FC Canada, is hardly in a credible position to appoint panels to assess allegations against the same industry."[91]

CCFI may have also strayed into potentially dangerous legal waters. Following the US CFI panel review of MFAC footage of Canadian egg farms in 2013, Crystal Mackay, Executive Director of F&FC Ontario at the time, attempted to discredit MFAC. In an interview with Better Farming, she implied that MFAC had manipulated its footage, and advised readers to remember that "MFAC is an animal rights group that doesn't believe in eating meat at all."[92]

In 2018, CCFI and its panel members made even more explicit attempts to discredit People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals (PETA) following its release of footage revealing horrifying conditions at a number of egg farms and related operations,[93] including Jaedel Enterprises and Elite Farm Services. All were located in Abbotsford, B.C.[94,95] In their report, panel members wrote that the 2.5 minutes of footage they reviewed were short and "cobbled together," that the video of buried and dead birds in manure pits "looks suspiciously staged," and blamed the investigator for not reporting any abuse.[96]

In response to the panel's attempts to discredit PETA's footage, Animal Justice informed the media that CCFI regularly claimed that footage of animal cruelty was staged or that videos were unclear or inconsistent, pointing out that full evidence was always carefully documented, verified, and investigated by law enforcement. Animal Justice stated that what was available to the public - which included CCFI and its panel members - were only segments of more comprehensive footage, and that "it is irresponsible and possibly illegal for CCFI to make such sweeping, decisive defamatory claims on the basis of so little information."[97]



> **"It is irresponsible and possibly illegal for CCFI to make such sweeping, decisive defamatory claims on the basis of so little information."** - Anna Pippus, Animal Justice

 Photo credit: Jo-Anne McArthur, We Animals (Canada)

Changing Focus: Good News Stories and Positive Messaging

CCFI's first years demonstrate a transitional period regarding strategy. Even though it used crisis management and attack-and-discredit tactics in its review panels, it was also working to establish a more proactive approach using Arnot's model of positive messaging and shared values. Its inaugural 2016 report noted that "historically when under pressure to change, the industry has responded by attacking the attackers and using science alone to justify current practices." It noted that profitability needs to be balanced with the sometimes competing interest of public support, which can be acquired through "effective value-based communication." The result can be a food system that is supported by both the industry and "the rational majority of consumers."[98]

Farmers and shared values

CCFI has since moved away from public attacks of critics, focusing instead on manufacturing an alternative narrative about the industry. This includes creating not just positive messages about agriculture, but producing appealing and credible spokespeople to share messages that convince the public to trust the industry and accept its practices. Remodelling farmers into relatable messengers, and creating a positive narrative around them is the "shared values" component of Charlie Arnot's public trust model.

CCFI's campaign Canada's Food System uses this approach. The campaign website was created in 2025 stating the vague goal of cutting through the "overwhelming" conversations around food by helping the public learn about the food system from trusted supporters.[99] The campaign website is similar in its goal to US CFI's Best Food Facts.[100] (See Appendix A).

The Canada's Food System campaign attempts to take advantage of current political attitudes towards the US by turning the Canadian agri-sector into a patriotic rallying point. Canadians are given the opportunity to sign a pledge showing support for Canada's food system and win grocery coupons. One of its current features is the podcast docuseries Canada's Food System: Our Food Our Future. The series is a six-part glorification of the industrial agri-food system, focusing on the passionate individuals working in it and their remarkable stories of triumphs and challenges.[101]

According to CCFI Executive Director, Lisa Bishop-Spencer, the goal of the docuseries is to "make Canadians feel positive about the food system."[102] Episodes feature smiling agriculture workers, sunny fields, and happy families, doing their best to bring healthy and nutritious food to the rest of us. Their version of animal agriculture does not include the filthy conditions, extreme confinement, painful mutilations, blunt force trauma, forced impregnation, or separation of mothers and babies previously dismissed by CCFI's review panels as standard practice.



CCFI's docuseries **Canada's Food System:** Our Food. Our Future promotes positive images and feel-good stories about farmers and agriculture.

Animal welfare

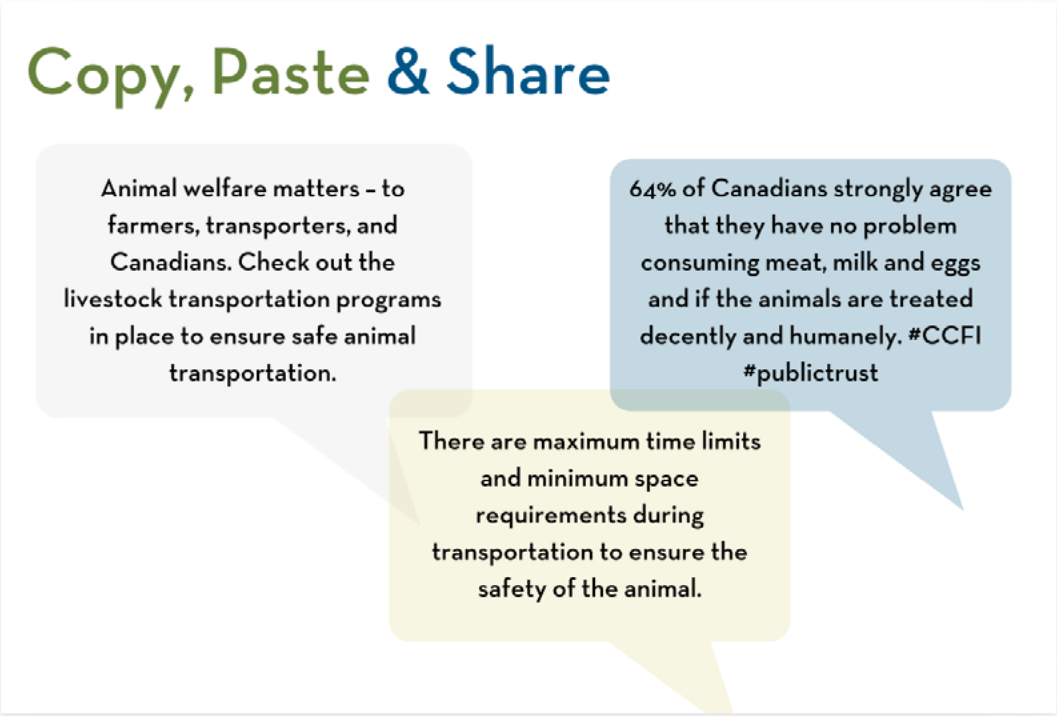
Making Canadians feel positive about the animal agriculture system is not an easy task. Its cruelty and abuses, both legal and illegal, have been exposed through decades of undercover investigations, public protest, and litigation. CCFI avoids these realities in its surveys by relying on questions that gauge support for indistinct concepts such as "humane treatment" of animals. For example, participants have been asked to identify to what degree they believe that meat, milk and eggs are derived from humanely treated animals, and whether they have a problem consuming meat, milk and eggs if farm animals are treated decently and humanely.[103] Surveys do not provide any definition of humane, invite participants to explain what they believe humane to mean, or ask what they actually know about the animal agriculture system, as opposed to what they believe.

Studies have shown that the term "humane" itself is misleading, since it is undefinable and subjective.[104] Even the industry has struggled to identify what CCFI's survey results indicate. In 2018, the Western Producer acknowledged that the public's perceptions can change from year to year, noting that in that year, footage of poor animal treatment "might have crept into the public psyche."[105]

The biggest challenge to gaining acceptance of the animal agriculture system by convincing the public that it is "humane" is that doing so requires ensuring that the public does not know the realities. The results of CCFI's 2019 AI software surveillance confirmed this dilemma. The study's results advised that public support may increase slightly with messaging that "claims animal welfare is highly regulated and farmers care about their animals."[106]

Focusing on regulation and farmers reveals a common public relations tactic of diverting attention away from the problem, in this case the treatment of animals, and redirecting it towards other irrelevant or misleading issues, such as blanket references to regulation or farmers. Relying on the former requires conflating regulation around food safety or animal transportation, which exists, with regulation around farmed animal welfare, which does not. Focusing on farmers relies on the implication that everyone working in the agriculture industry can be trusted to do the right thing for animals voluntarily, regardless of regulation.

CCFI's 2021 Insight Report on Livestock Transportation is an example of recommending both of these approaches.[107] In its report, CCFI advised members to focus on food safety and transportation regulations as examples of good welfare practices. It also recommended focusing on industry employees by using "personal stories about real people's life experiences."



In its Insight Report on livestock transportation, CCFI advised members to focus on key talking points and unified messaging.

Myths and Misinformation

CCFI has shifted away from direct confrontations with activists and reactive responses to undercover investigations. Rather than engaging with evidence-based critiques, it now frames criticism of industry practices as fear-mongering. Any assessment that contradicts curated positive narratives is labeled as social media-driven "misinformation" or "disinformation," while public concerns that diverge from industry talking points are dismissed as mere "myths." CCFI, like other agriculture front groups, positions itself as a knowledgeable and reliable source that can be trusted to allay public fears and dispel false beliefs.

This emphasis on fear, misinformation and myths was evident at CCFI's 2025 annual summit entitled "Fear, Facts, and Food: The Fight for Trust," where presentations covered topics such as "The Science of Misinformation," "Disarming the Misinformation Machine," "When Misinformation Crosses Borders," and "Misinformation, Disruption and the Battle For Credibility."[108] Speakers addressed the impact of American food influencers like Vani Hari, known as the Food Babe. They also discussed US politicians Robert F. Kennedy Jr. and Donald Trump as sources of misinformation, reflecting US CFI's preoccupation with critics of processed food, such as Kennedy and Hari.[109] Notably, speakers did not identify sources of misinformation in Canada, or specific agricultural products or practices that are of concern to the Canadian public.

Framing anything negative about the industry as misinformation and myth serves as a way to dismiss public concerns without addressing why a particular concern may exist or where it has come from, or providing any meaningful explanation in response. CCFI took this approach in its 2026 Canada's Agriculture Day campaign. Canada's Ag Day was created in 2017 by front group Agriculture More Than Ever as yet another way to 'celebrate' Canadian agriculture.[110] Ag More Than Ever was absorbed by CCFI in 2021, which now leads the Canada's Ag Day initiative.

One of the so-called myths that CCFI's campaign addressed was the predominance of large corporate-run farms in Canada. CCFI attempted to correct this belief with the "fact" that about 97% of farms are family-owned and operated. The family farm is one of the most common images to appear in agriculture public trust marketing, used by groups such as the Chicken Farmers of Canada,[111] Agriculture in the Classroom,[112] and F&FC.[113] The message is meant to conjure images of individual farmers and their families running their own small-scale farms, who are more relatable than faceless and unpopular corporations like CropLife and Monsanto.[114]



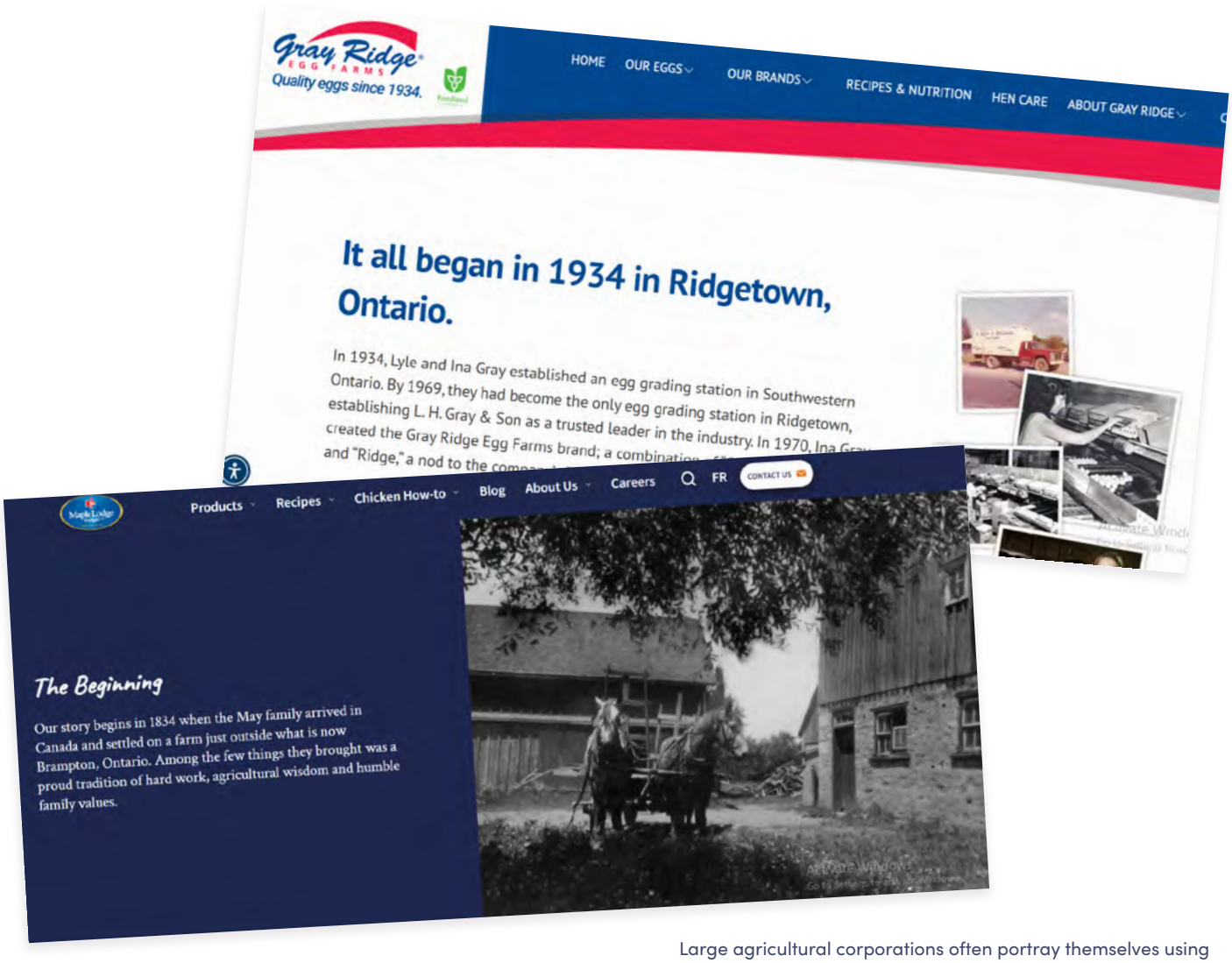


In its 2026 Canada's Agriculture Day campaign, CCFI promoted positive messaging under the guise of dispelling 'myths' about agriculture.[115, 116]

It is, however, a misleading statement since ownership has little bearing on the size or practices of a farm. In Canada's contract farming system, most individual farmers work on contract for major agribusinesses. Many industrial companies such as Cargill[117] and Tyson[118] in the US, and Burnbrae[119] and Maple Lodge[120] in Canada, promote themselves as family owned and operated. Some of the worst abuses have occurred at "family" run businesses, including those that were the subject of US CFI and CCFI review panels such as Gray Ridge Egg Farms.[121]

CCFI's myth-busting campaign also addressed the public's supposed belief that farming has not changed in decades, countered with the "fact" that it now looks very different. This strategy exploits the public's general lack of knowledge about where their food comes from, relying on the assumption that most people expect agriculture to be dominated by small-scale operations, red barns and traditional practices of the past, and are uncomfortable with modern industrialization. The strategy is to displace traditional images of agriculture - even though they are the same reassuring family farm images that front groups frequently use - with dazzling images of computers and state-of-the-art technology. The aim is to convince the public to accept modern agriculture, with its industrial practices and intense mechanization.[122]

This approach of trying to convince the public to accept what the agri-food system is, rather than facilitating discussion about whether it needs to change, reflects the industry's goal of maintaining social license. It deflects responsibility from the industry for aligning its practices with modern expectations and ethical standards, placing responsibility on the public to temper its expectations to align with existing practices, however harmful or unjust they may be.



Large agricultural corporations often portray themselves using images of small, traditional family farms with wholesome values.

The Influence: Selling the Concepts of Social License and Public Trust

Research that Manufactures Crises and Solutions

The data that CCFI gathers through surveys and surveillance not only informs the messaging that it promotes to industry partners, but also serves as the foundation for its appeals to politicians. Along with the Canadian Federation of Agriculture (CFA) and other allies, CCFI has been advocating since its inception for governments to accept the legitimacy of its concept of social license to operate, and to support public trust campaigns designed to protect it.

By framing its data as research, and its findings as considered analysis, CCFI has sought to promote itself as a professional, neutral and quasi-academic body that serves an important function. It has presented the results of its work as evidence of a lack of public acceptance of the modern industrial practices necessary to produce food. It has framed this lack of acceptance not as a consequence of the industry's unwillingness to meet societal expectations, but as the public's disconnection from the food system, and its susceptibility to misinformation.

CCFI and its industry allies have advocated for public relations campaigns as the remedy for this manufactured crisis. By persuading decision-makers to support public trust initiatives or face potential economic threats to the industrial framework that both corporate agriculture and governments have come to rely on, they have successfully redirected government focus away from improved standards, greater transparency and accountability.

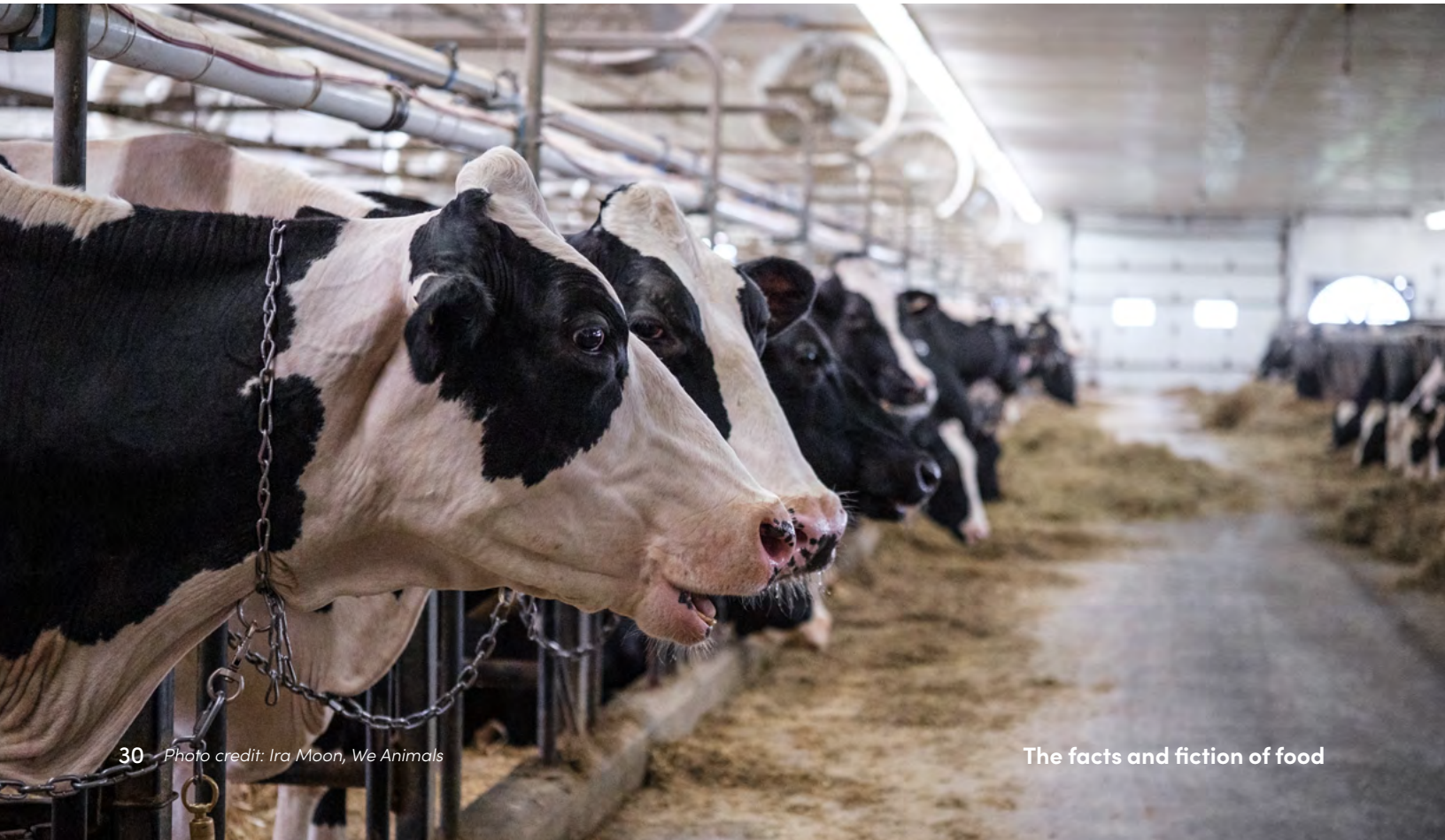


Photo credit: Ira Moon, We Animals

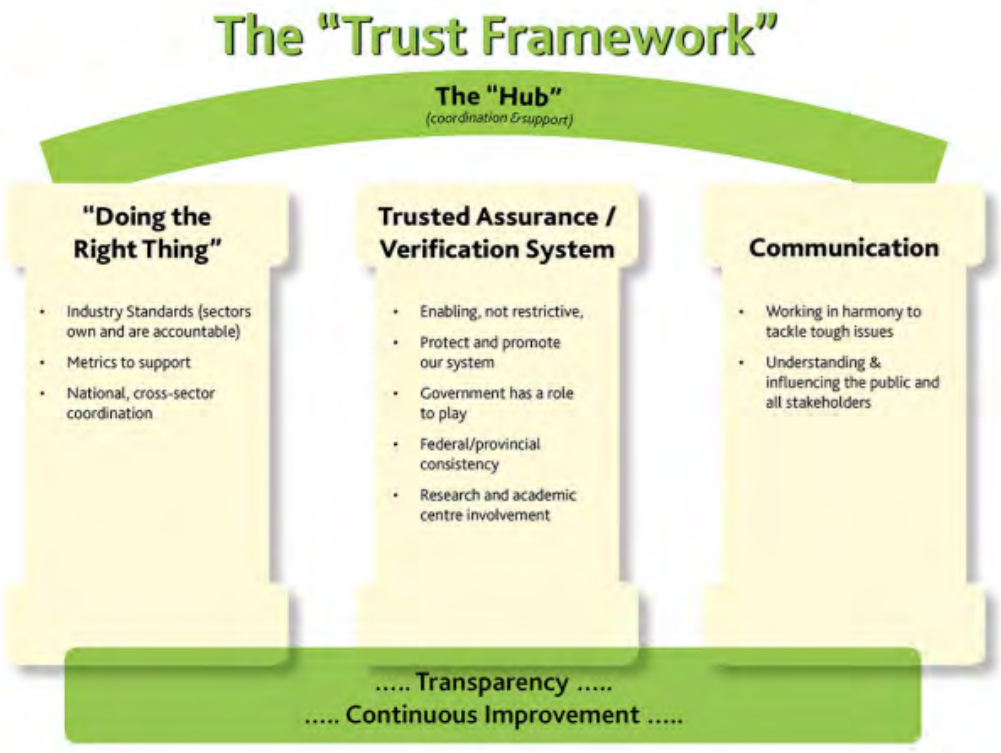
Industry Lobbying

Lobbying governments to adopt the social license and public trust agenda accelerated in the early 2010s, at the same time that Charlie Arnot was promoting the concepts to the Canadian agriculture industry itself. In 2014, the federal, provincial and territorial (FPT) ministers of Agriculture held their annual meeting in Winnipeg to discuss policy and funding plans for the agri-food sector. Social license and the need to preserve public trust were also discussed.[123] The following year, FPT ministers met in Charlottetown to discuss Canada's next agricultural policy framework, the federal government's five-year strategy that identifies its priorities for the agri-food sector, and outlines the funding that will be provided to the industry in order to achieve them.[124] Social license and public trust were again on the agenda.[125]

At the 2015 FPT conference, the CFA held its social license roundtable, focussing on public trust.[126] At the same time, the CFA prepared a paper for the federal department of Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada, *Building Trust and Transparency: A Discussion Paper*.[127] The paper emphasised the importance of maintaining the agriculture industry's social license, the difficulty in securing wide agreement on "acceptable agricultural practices" and the need to remedy this through focusing on societal perceptions of key areas, including animal welfare. The paper noted that communicating with the public and trying to meet expectations comes at a cost to the industry and individual producers, which "may jeopardize export potential and affect the industry's long-term competitiveness." The CFA recommended that social license be considered as a feature of the next agriculture policy framework, that governments and industry work together to develop communications programs to maintain social license and public trust, and that the government create a roundtable on social license.[128]

During this period, a broad group of industry stakeholders, spearheaded by CCFI's Kim McConnell, met to discuss and develop strategies for collaborating and securing government support. In 2016, the group produced *Canadian Journey to Social License - Public Trust*, providing a brief overview of its lobbying efforts up to that point, in preparation for CCFI's first annual summit.[129] At the CCFI summit, the Canadian journey to social license and public trust was on the agenda.[130]

Two years later, in 2018, the federal government provided over $400,000 in funding to the CFA and CCFI to establish a Public Trust Steering Committee to develop a public trust strategy.[131] In 2019, CCFI replaced the Committee with the mandate of providing a coordinated approach to advancing public trust.[132]



"In 2015, industry groups developed a 'Trust Framework' model identifying three basic pillars for advancing social license and public trust." *Canadian Journey to Social License Public Trust.*

Embedding Social License and Public Trust in Government Funding and Policy

Canada's Agricultural Policy Framework

Efforts to secure support for public trust in the agricultural policy framework were successful. In July 2016, the FPT ministers of Agriculture met in Calgary and released the Calgary Statement, identifying their six priority funding areas.[133] For the first time, public trust was included as a priority area. Its goal was to protect the reputation of Canada's agriculture and support its competitiveness in the face of growing public concern about the environment, animal welfare, and health and safety by finding new and effective ways to engage and respond to the public. Recommended projects included reinforcing confidence in the agriculture sector, ensuring quality, supporting the industry's ability to anticipate and respond to evolving public demands, and sharing the story of the sector's importance and its modern, responsible and sustainable practices. Improving animal welfare to meet public expectations and international standards through government regulation and oversight was not identified as a priority.

The following year, the Standing Committee on Agriculture and Agri-Food held hearings to gather input from the agriculture sector.[134] Its report revealed consistent use of social license and public trust messaging by industry witnesses, including the public's lack of understanding of the realities of modern agriculture, as well as the need to focus on public awareness campaigns, to bring in credible spokespeople for the industry, and to support programs that convince the public that the industry is meeting expectations.[135] The Standing Committee recommended that the government support public trust by increasing confidence in the industry, providing financial support for public awareness activities, and supporting voluntary industry-led assurance programs such as the Chicken Farmers of Canada's Raised by a Canadian Farmer,[136] the Dairy Farmers of Canada's proAction program,[137] and the Egg Farmers of Canada's Egg Quality Assurance program.[138]

The final result was the 2018-2023 Canadian Agricultural Partnership (CAP).[139] CAP identified six program areas for funding totalling $3 billion. One of these, the AgriAssurance Program, offered up to $74 million of public funds to industry recipients to foster public trust through projects that would help them "make credible, meaningful and verifiable claims about the health and safety of Canadian agricultural and agri-food products, and the manner in which they are produced."

CAP was succeeded by the 2023-2028 Sustainable Canadian Agricultural Partnership (S-CAP). S-CAP is underpinned by the FPT ministers of Agriculture's Guelph Statement, which identified five priority areas.[140] One of these is Resiliency and Public Trust, with objectives such as developing, adopting and enhancing assurance programs, fostering awareness of sector commitments, building public trust, and increasing sector awareness of consumer expectations.

S-CAP provides $3.5 billion to the same six program areas funded under CAP. The AgriAssurance Program covers projects aimed at building public trust, providing $64.05 million for projects that support industry-led assurance systems that address specific concerns including challenges to public trust, and the ability to make verifiable claims in order to meet market requirements.[141]

Since its inclusion as a priority in agriculture policy frameworks, hundreds of millions of dollars in federal and provincial funding have flowed to agriculture front groups, industry organizations and marketing agencies for public relations campaigns designed to build public trust in agriculture.[142]

Examples of federal public trust funding, 2017-2026	
Agriculture in the Classroom	$7,345,234
Animal Health Canada	$9,809,235
Canada Beef	$184,000
Canadian Cattle Association	$11,090,973
Canadian Centre for Food Integrity	$1,145,416
Canadian Federation of Agriculture	$251,250
Canadian Food Focus	$208,670
Canadian Pork Council	$5,000,000
Dairy Farmers of Canada	$16,088,211
Farm & Food Care	$2,160,448
National Cattle Feeders Association	$260,980
The Royal Agricultural Winter Fair Assoc. of Canada	$35,253

Source: Government of Canada Grants and Contributions: https://search.open.canada.ca/grants/



Photo credit: Ira Moon, We Animals (Ontario)

Perception of Public Trust in the Canadian Agricultural Sector

The integration of public trust into the national agriculture policy framework was complimented by the Standing Committee on Agriculture and Agri-Food's 2019 study entitled Perception of and Public Trust in the Canadian Agricultural Sector. The purpose of the study was not to understand public perceptions, or the priorities of the public itself, but to understand the challenges faced by the industry in improving public trust.[143] The Committee heard from CCFI, as well as numerous industry organizations repeating its messaging such as Bayer Canada, CropLife Canada, Egg Farmers of Canada, NFACC, and the CFA.

> **"We caution the government against providing this kind of funding and moral support to a PR campaign - run by some of the world's largest and wealthiest corporations - which is seeking to influence the opinions of Canadians as part of a strategy to reduce publicly accountable regulation of the food system."**— National Farmers Union

Not all submissions to the Standing Committee were in support of the social license and public trust agenda. Organizations such as Prevent Cancer Now, the Canadian Environmental Law Association, and the Canadian Biotechnology Action Network viewed any so-called lack of public trust as a consequence of inherent failures in the agri-food system, calling for changes such as greater transparency, regulation, oversight, sustainable practices, and standardized labelling.

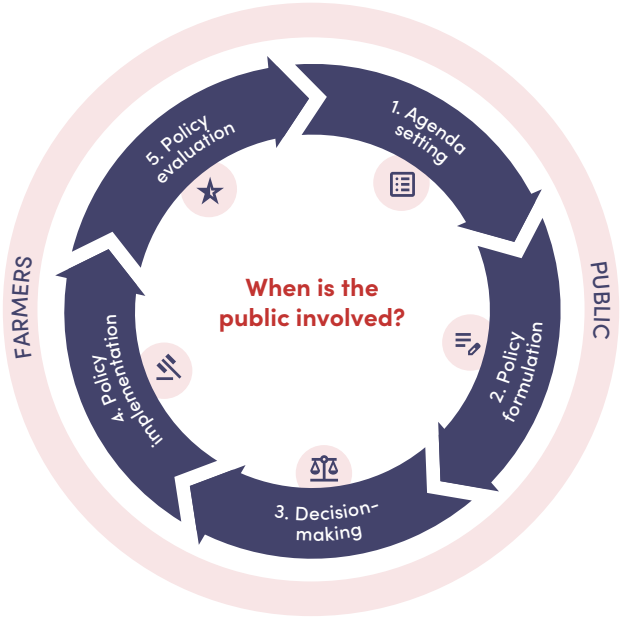
Notably, the National Farmers Union (NFU) was the most knowledgeable and critical of industry public trust marketing, calling out the lobbying efforts of front groups like US CFI, F&FC and CCFI and their promotion of public trust initiatives in place of responsible policy, regulation and accountability. As a national farm organization, the NFU advocates for small scale farmers and producers and sustainable practices, and opposes corporate control of the agri-food system.[144] In the conclusion to its submission, it stated: "We caution the government against providing this kind of funding and moral support to a PR campaign - run by some of the world's largest and wealthiest corporations - which is seeking to influence the opinions of Canadians as part of a strategy to reduce publicly accountable regulation of the food system."[145]

Summary

Over the past 20 years Canadian front groups, informed by the anti-regulation agenda of the US Center for Food Integrity, have worked to redirect government priorities, with the goal of preserving the agriculture industry's ability to operate with minimal restrictions or oversight. Persistent and extensive lobbying efforts have taken corporate capture of government policy to a new level, creating a closed circle that includes the government and a select segment of the industry that represents corporate, conventional and predominantly animal-based agriculture. This circle has brought together parties who reaffirm shared interests in unconstrained industrial agriculture, while dissenting voices of small farms, alternative and progressive farmers, and their representatives, as well as animal, environment and health advocates, and the public are excluded from the decision-making process.[146]

By hiding behind the front groups they fund, which may be less known or understood by the public, corporate actors have not only been able to influence policy, but secure funding to influence public opinion in order to protect those policies. Public trust initiatives have been receiving millions of dollars of public funds, not to improve standards, practices or accountability, but to secure acceptance of corporate interests.

Changing Public Policy



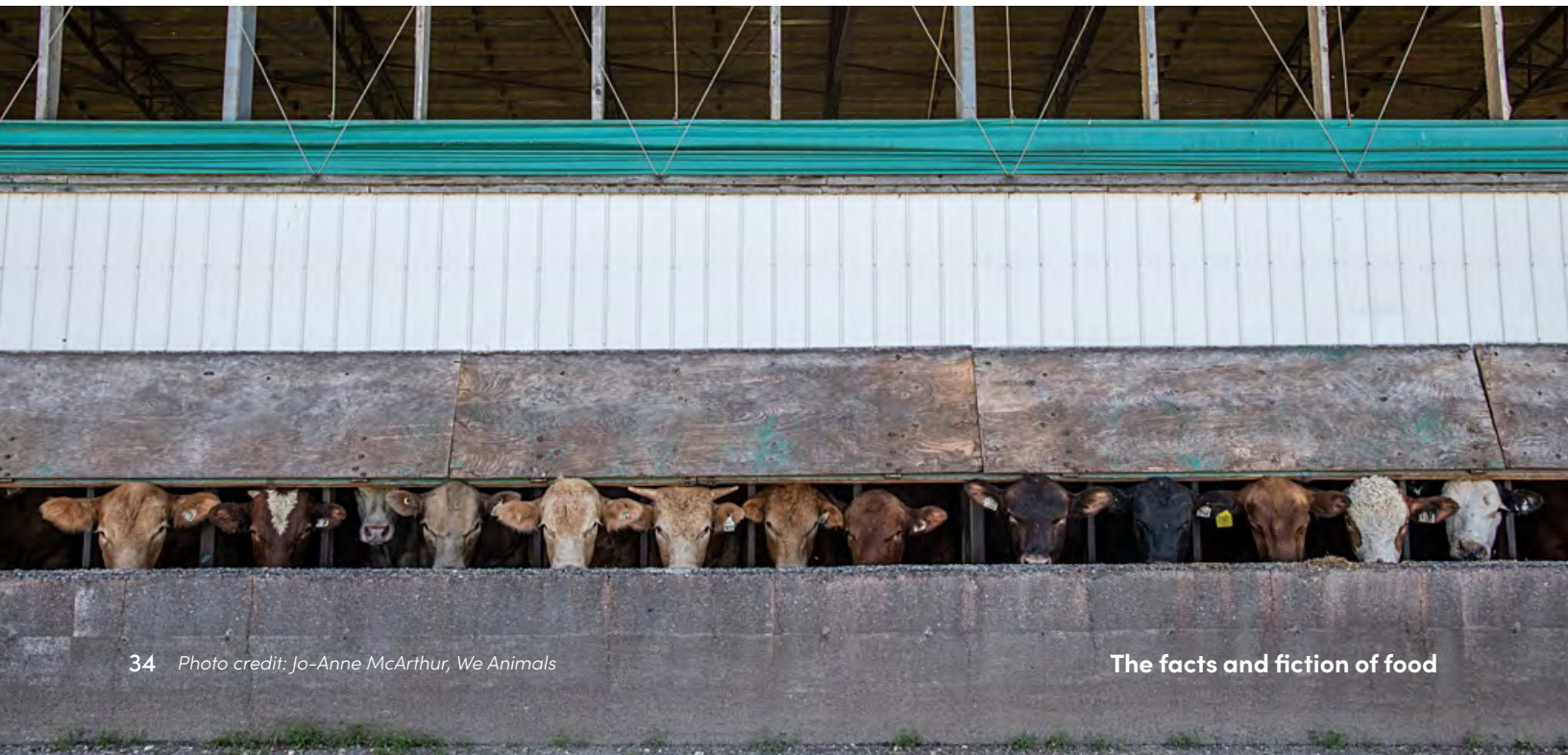


 Photo credit: Jo-Anne McArthur, We Animals

Part 3:

Corporate Backtracking: How Agriculture Front Groups Influence Private Sector Animal Welfare Policy



Photo credit: Jo-Anne McArthur, We Animals

The Illusion of Private Sector Governance

By adopting and promoting the US Center for Food Integrity's social license and public trust agenda, the Canadian Centre for Food Integrity (CCFI) has been instrumental in working public trust as a priority into national agriculture policy frameworks. Its success has depended on its integration into the private sector. CCFI's influence on government policy has grown in parallel with its influence on the agriculture industry itself.

Since its inception CCFI's membership has expanded to include national marketing agencies and provincial marketing boards, as well as producers and food companies. As a result, the social license agenda and public trust messaging has become more prevalent in industry marketing and corporate social responsibility programs. By aligning private sector interests under a uniform public relations strategy, CCFI and its industry members and partners have moved beyond storytelling to actively shaping both public and private animal welfare policy in Canada.

The Role of Industry Marketing Groups in Advancing the Front Group Agenda

CCFI's membership consists largely of agriculture marketing and trade associations. While the agendas and activities of front groups are often obscured, these powerful industry groups engage openly in lobbying and public relations to promote the economic interests of the industries they represent. The national marketing agencies representing Canada's dairy, egg, and poultry industries are among The Hill Times' "Top 100 Lobbyists in 2026."[1]

Because these organizations are more transparent about their economic interests and membership composition, they are also more susceptible to public scrutiny. A 2023 Research Co. survey found that agricultural industry groups were among the least trusted by Canadians relative to more highly trusted animal protection organizations, animal welfare scientists, and governments. Corporations ranked even lower.[2]

Low trust helps to explain a series of industry group name changes that have taken place over the past 30 years in an attempt to improve the public's perception of their leadership and purpose. The Canadian Egg Marketing Agency was established in 1972 under *The Farm Products Marketing Agencies Act of 1972*,[3] followed by the establishment of the Canadian Turkey Marketing Agency in 1973,[4] and the Canadian Chicken Marketing Agency in 1978.[5] These national marketing agencies function like statutory cartels. They are authorized to collect fees from farmers, control production, set prices, and limit competition.[6] Their purview and statutory authority was accurately reflected in their names.

However, all three agencies rebranded in the 1990s and 2000s to become the Egg Farmers of Canada, Turkey Farmers of Canada, and Chicken Farmers of Canada. These changes marked an important public relations shift. By adopting "Farmers" in place of "Marketing Agency" these organizations aimed to portray themselves as a grassroots collection of family farmers and evoke pastoral imagery. In practice, they are corporate and administrative bodies that increasingly focus on marketing as a way to counter growing public concern about animal agriculture.

Alongside this rebranding, marketing agencies have increasingly adopted the social license and public trust agenda. Since becoming members of CCFI, both the CFC and EFC have incorporated common disinformation tactics into both their industry communications and public marketing (see Appendix B).

Assurance Programs and the Guise of Regulation

In addition to adopting positive messaging, marketing agencies have created their own self-certification schemes known as "assurance programs." Assurance programs were identified by the 2017 Agriculture and Agri-Food Standing Committee and industry witnesses as a significant method that the industry can use to promote public trust in order to secure its social license to operate, including CFC's "Raised by a Canadian Farmer," EFC's Egg Quality Assurance Program, and the Dairy Farmers of Canada's (DFC) proAction Program. (see Part 2) These programs are designed to convince the public that certain food products meet standards that go above and beyond minimum requirements. In reality, they are marketing tools that do little more than codify existing standard industrial practices under the guise of providing higher welfare certification.



Chicken Farmers of Canada's Raised by a Canadian Farmer

"Responding to growing demands from consumers to know where their food comes from, Chicken Farmers of Canada has introduced its 'Raised by a Canadian Farmer,' a branding program showcasing the commitment of farmers to provide families with nutritious chicken raised to the highest standards of care, quality and freshness."[7]

Egg Farmers of Canada's Egg Quality Assurance program

"The Egg Quality Assurance™ (EQA®) program is an industry-wide initiative that certifies Canadian eggs are produced according to strict food safety and animal welfare standards... By certifying local farms for standards of quality, food safety and animal welfare, the EQA® program ensures Canadians can get eggs they can trust, reflecting farmers' commitments to rigorous egg production."[8]

Dairy Farmers of Canada's proAction program

"Consumers want to know more about what is in their food and where it comes from. That is why Dairy Farmers of Canada developed proAction®, a national quality assurance program for the Canadian dairy sector. proAction is mandatory on all Canadian dairy farms, providing a framework for high standards of farming. Under proAction, farmers demonstrate excellence in six distinct areas: milk quality, food safety, animal care, livestock traceability, biosecurity, and environment."[9]

 Photo credit: Jo-Anne McArthur, We Animals

The National Pride Shield

Assurance programs frequently rely on national pride by promoting "made in Canada" as an exceptional feature of their commodity. The CFC works the strategy directly into the name of its program, Raised by a Canadian Farmer. In reality, the program offers nothing unique since over 90 percent of the chicken sold at Canadian grocery stores is produced in Canada.[10]

The DFC uses the Canadian flag in the logo of its proAction program. It also promotes the program as 'underpinning' another of its marketing tools, the Blue Cow logo, which it uses on packaging to indicate products made with 100% milk and milk ingredients.[11] DFC does not identify specifically how the two programs are connected, or acknowledge the fact that through supply management, which places restrictions on agriculture imports, there are already significantly low import rates within the dairy industry.[12]

Protecting the "Canadian Farmer"

By focusing heavily on the "Canadian farmer," assurance programs evoke images of family-owned farms, deflecting attention from the industrial scale of modern farming. It allows the industry to frame any criticism of poor animal welfare practices as an attack on Canadian farmers - the vast majority of whom work on contract for major agribusinesses.

The Baseline as Excellence

Assurance programs regularly use superlatives such as "rigorous," "strict," "robust," "stringent," and "world-class," implying that the standards used in producing the commodities they represent significantly exceed average standards of products that are not part of the program. However, assurance programs rely on the same standards that are common to the industry as a whole. While the CFC's Raised by a Canadian Farmer claims to use "the highest standards of care, quality and freshness," it identifies these standards as those laid out in National Farm Animal Care Council (NFACC) codes of practice (see below).[13] It does not acknowledge that these are the standards commonly used by the entire Canadian industry, which sanction practices such as poor litter quality resulting in high ammonia environments, and breeding chickens for unnaturally rapid growth.

The EFC's Quality Assurance program also claims to ensure that "rigorous standards for animal welfare" are followed. However, like the CFC's program, these standards are NFACC codes of practice. Claims such as these merely rebrand established industry practices as exceptional. Established practices identified in codes for egg production include the use of battery cages, and macerating live male chicks.

The Guise of Regulation

Assurance programs operate as an industry-led alternative to government regulation. They are regularly marketed as mandatory to give the appearance of legislative authority, despite carrying no legal consequences. While these programs often promote audits and "traceability" to ensure compliance, they lack independent oversight. Operating outside of public regulation allows them to escape freedom of information requirements designed to ensure genuine transparency and accountability.

The Institutionalization of the Front Group Approach in Canada

Voluntary assurance programs have taken the place of government oversight and mandatory compliance. However, they are just one of the ways in which the agricultural sector has been able to evade public accountability and transparency. Codes of practice, developed by the industry-dominated National Farm Animal Care Council, have served as Canada's substitute for independent and legally binding animal welfare standards. By partnering with front groups like CCFI, the agriculture industry has effectively legitimized both of these initiatives as essential pillars of government social license and public trust policy.

AgriAssurance as Policy

As efforts to get public trust on the political agenda increased in the early 2010s, industry stakeholders increasingly looked to assurance programs as a means of securing social license. In its 2015 *Building Trust and Transparency: A Discussion Paper* (see Part 2), the Canadian Federation of Agriculture identified assurance programs as one of the ways that the industry had been responding to consumer concerns about food production, noting that these and other efforts operate at a cost to producers and the industry. The CFA's report called on governments to support the industry's existing initiatives and communications campaigns by including social license in its next agriculture policy framework.[14]

Serious discussion of assurance programs appeared when industry stakeholders produced *Canadian Journey to Social License - Public Trust* in preparation for CCFI's first annual summit (see Part 2).The report identified the "trust framework" that industry members had developed, with the goal of advancing social license and public trust. One of the three pillars of the framework was Trusted Assurance. At the time, the industry does not appear to have decided yet what, if any, role it wanted government or regulation to play in assurance programs.[15]

Up to this point, assurance programs had played a relatively minor role in Canada's agriculture policy frameworks. As part of the 2013-18 Growing Forward 2 policy framework, funding fell under Assurance Systems, one of four streams of the AgriMarketing category. The objective of the AgriMarketing category as a whole was to help the industry to maintain access to markets. The purpose of the Assurance Systems stream was to help the industry meet buyer and market demands for assurance in order to enhance competitiveness.[16]

However, as the *Growing Forward 2* policy framework reached its conclusion, the potential for assurance programs to build public trust as a means of securing the industry's social license had become part of the government's discussions. In its 2017 evaluation of the Assurance Systems program, Agriculture and Agri-food Canada's Office of Audit and Evaluation identified the potential for the "emerging" concept of social license to shape the government's future role in programs that support the development of voluntary assurance systems. It acknowledged the CFA's 2015 *Building Trust and Transparency: A Discussion Paper*'s call for social license to be considered during development of the next policy framework.[17]

The subsequent 2018-23 Canadian Agricultural Partnership (CAP) was the first agriculture policy framework to include public trust as a priority. It was also the first to include AgriAssurance as a stand-alone category, with the revised objective to "foster public trust by helping industry develop and adopt systems, standards and tools that enable them to make credible, meaningful and verifiable claims about the health and safety of Canadian agricultural and agri-food products, and the manner in which they are produced."[18] AgriAssurance has been retained as a category in the 2023-2028 Sustainable Agricultural Partnership (S-CAP).[19]

The National Farm Animal Care Council's Descent into Marketing

Assurance programs have always functioned as marketing tools, intended to reinforce public confidence in existing industry practices rather than elevate animal welfare standards above the minimum established by the NFACC codes of practice. As a result, they have seamlessly integrated into the broader public trust and social license frameworks adopted by governments. NFACC itself has made a more concerted effort to expand beyond its original mandate as the body designed to establish welfare standards to a marketing instrument working to maintain the industry's social license through self-regulation.

Unlike many comparable jurisdictions, Canada has no comprehensive federal or provincial legislation establishing enforceable, on-farm standards for the treatment of farmed animals.[20] In its place, NFACC was established in 2005 as a private organization to develop voluntary species-specific codes of practice for animals used in agriculture. In the absence of formal government regulation and oversight, NFACC has functioned as the national mechanism for farmed animal welfare standard-setting in Canada. Despite this, its codes of practice have been inconsistently implemented by provinces and territories, and largely unenforceable.[21]

NFACC adopts the public trust agenda

As CCFI's influence grew throughout the 2010s, NFACC enthusiastically adopted front group messaging around the need to build public trust, rebranding itself as a vital partner in maintaining the industry's social license. This became apparent when the concept of building trust with the public appeared in NFACC's annual reports, starting in 2011.[22] Its 2013 annual report noted that "'social licence' and 'building trust' have become the buzz words of the day in and around the agriculture and food industries." It included a section on "Providing Solutions for Industry and Building Trust in the Marketplace."[23] By 2018, NFACC was referring to itself as "critical for maintaining public trust in how farmers care for their animals." Its annual report that year included a new section, "Preserving Public Trust," again referring to public trust as "the new buzz word."[24]

NFACC repeated the same claims during the Standing Committee on Agriculture and Agri-Food's study *Perception of and Public Trust in the Canadian Agricultural Sector in 2019* (see Part 2). Chair of NFACC, Ryder Lee, spoke to the committee about NFACC's role in supporting public trust in agriculture. He noted that "public trust is a pretty new buzzword," but that maintaining it for agriculture is imperative. Lee referred to NFACC as a "critical piece in the public trust puzzle around farm animal welfare," adding that federal funding to support its projects is important.[25]

During his testimony to the Standing Committee in 2019, Lee also referred to the fact that NFACC had received federal funding through the AgriAssurance program to develop codes of practice. This has continued under subsequent funding streams. In 2023, Animal Health Canada, acting as the administrative and fiduciary lead for NFACC, secured a $4.8 million grant that included support for "Communication activities [that] support Code awareness and implementation, while building public trust for the Codes and the collaborative and inclusive process by which they are developed."[26]



By 2021, NFACC had fully invested in the public trust model. Until then, its annual reports had been entitled *Market Relevant Codes and Communication Leadership.*[27] In 2021, it adopted the new title, *Advancing Animal Welfare and Public Trust Through Codes of Practice.*[28]

The membership capture of animal agriculture

The shift in NFACC's focus from a strictly standard-setting body to an important partner in the industry's strategic efforts to maintain social license and building public trust coincided with CCFI's growing influence throughout the 2010s. At the same time, CCFI and NFACC's membership of industry and marketing groups increasingly overlapped.

Today, more than one third of NFACC's primary and voting members are also CCFI members.[29] NFACC is no longer merely a private entity that establishes Canada's on-farm animal welfare guidelines. It is now part of a broad network of industry stakeholders that have adopted the front group agenda of social license and public trust, receiving millions of dollars in public funding to protect industry interests, maximize profits, and avoid regulation.

Members of both CCFI and NFACC
Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada*
Burnbrae Farms
Cargill
Canadian Aquaculture Industry Alliance*
Canadian Cattle Association (formerly Canadian Cattlemen's Association)*
Canadian Federation of Agriculture*
Canadian Hatching Egg Producers*
Chicken Farmers of Canada*
Dairy Farmers of Canada*
Egg Farmers of Canada*
Farm Credit Canada (FCC)
Loblaw Companies Limited
Restaurants Canada
Retail Council of Canada*
Saputo
Turkey Farmers of Canada*

**NFACC Board Member.*



 Photo credit: Julie LP, We Animals, Canada

Front Group Influence on Corporate Animal Welfare Policy

Front groups, marketing agencies, and their assurance programs have also extensively influenced how food companies manage animal welfare in their ESG frameworks. Following the front group agenda's successful infiltration of NFACC and its members, CCFI's membership expanded in the 2020s to include grocery retailers. These Canadian companies proceeded to backtrack on their animal welfare commitments in a similar manner to those in the United States. This was effectively a new way to resist regulatory efforts, now in the form of undermining longstanding corporate animal welfare policies.

When animal welfare was initially integrated into the corporate responsibility programs of food companies in Canada, it appeared in the standard form of globally recognized ESG policies, which are specific, measurable, and time-bound. This framework is meant to demonstrate business integrity, responsiveness to consumers, and public accountability for commitments that are otherwise voluntary. In the case of cage-free egg sourcing policies—the most widely adopted corporate animal welfare policy in the world with 2,600+ companies committed—the global standard is also reflected in the ESG reporting frameworks used by food companies, the Sustainability Accounting Standards Board (SASB) and the Global Reporting Initiative (GRI).[30]

However, since ESG policies have been an important tool for the public to ensure that commonly held social values inform the practices of major corporations, these policies have become new targets for front groups and their members seeking to undermine efforts at regulation.

Diminishing Corporate Animal Welfare Policy, 2016–2025

Following years of constructive collaboration between NGOs and corporations that ensured that Canadian companies would meet global standards for farmed animal welfare, front groups, marketing agencies, and producers attempted to discredit activists and replace credible, independent research with industry-funded marketing. Canadian food companies following this US-based PR approach, and incorporating their messaging and anti-regulation stance, began to fall out of step with global trends and investor expectations.

Since the front group approach was integrated by NFACC, marketing agencies, and producers, Canadian food companies increasingly cite these entities and the industry's assurance programs in place of their own standards. Several major companies have even endorsed new "enriched" cages despite the fact that nowhere in the world is any cage system considered a valid part of a corporate animal welfare commitment. And, since the industry is already transitioning to "enriched" cages, companies are now misrepresenting existing industry standards as their own ESG policies. This ultimately serves to protect the industry's social license by advancing the narrative that the industry is already regulated.

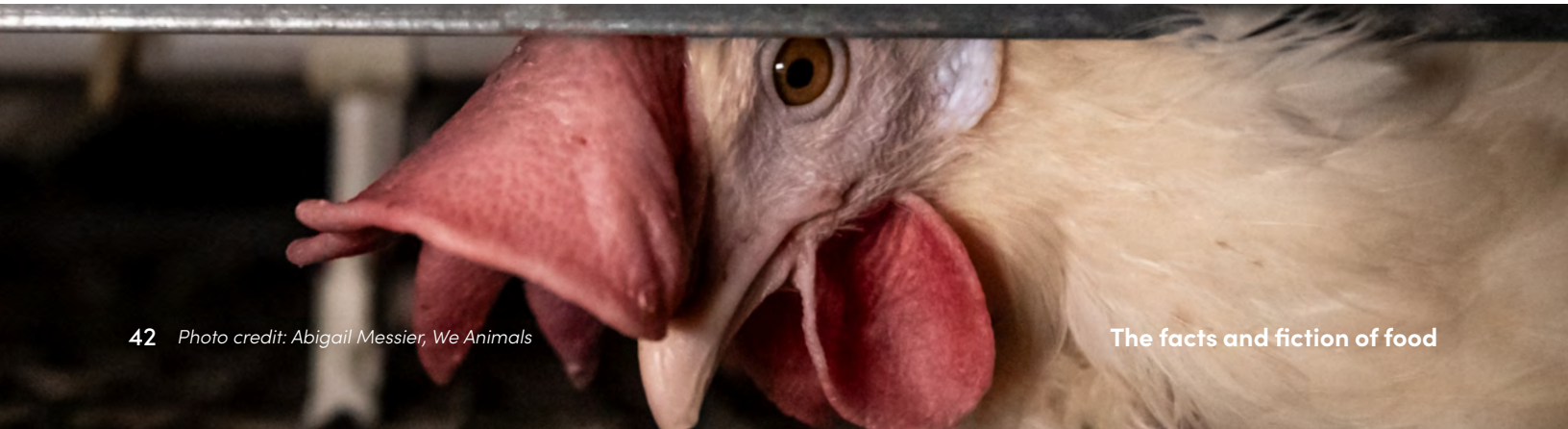


 Photo credit: Abigail Messier, We Animals

Mapping US Influence on Canada's Corporate Animal Welfare Policy

Walmart

One of the more explicit connections between a food company's animal welfare backtracking and front group activity is Walmart's partnership with US CFI to assess the cage-free transition in the US. Incidentally, this was published the same year that CCFI member, the Retail Council of Canada (RCC)—representing all of Canada's major grocery stores—announced it was backtracking on its cage-free policy.

Walmart commissioned US CFI to conduct a "transition study" in 2021, "Evolving Dynamics of Animal Welfare and Sustainability."[31] This partnership on its own is extremely telling. One of the largest grocery retailers in the US selected an agriculture front group—not an independent agricultural economist or animal welfare scientist—to produce a supposedly independent study about its cage-free transition. The specific group Walmart selected, US CFI, was already known for its partnership with Monsanto to defend the toxic weed-killer Roundup, while its membership composition is dominated by agribusinesses like egg producers and egg marketing agencies.

The goal of US CFI's study for Walmart was purportedly to understand "market conditions, production realities, and interrelated sustainability impacts of hen housing and egg production." The central thesis of the report was that due to three conditions—supply, affordability, and customer demand—cage-free egg production was not on pace to support a cage-free transition by 2025. Yet, in response to this concern about timing, companies that work with US CFI or CCFI have not simply issued new deadlines. Instead, many have diminished their commitments to reach 100 percent cage-free or removed deadlines entirely.

Metro

The year after Walmart's partnership with CFI, Canada's third largest grocery retailer, Metro, commissioned a study about cage-free eggs by an undisclosed partner. In 2021, prior to the study, Metro clarified its commitment to source cage-free eggs, stating that "the industry would not be able to fulfill the commitment in a timely manner" but that "METRO will continue to work with its suppliers to increase its supply of such products and remains firmly committed to achieving its animal welfare goals..."[32]

However, in Metro's next Corporate Responsibility Report, the company diminished its cage-free policy, stating, "METRO recognizes that cage-free systems offer more opportunities for hens to express their natural behaviours than enriched cages. However, there is currently no scientific consensus that cage-free housing provides better overall welfare for hens."[33]

Importantly, this perspective is unique to the Canadian market where research is primarily industry-funded. The vast majority of animal welfare science supports cage-free housing for hens, including the European Food Safety Authority's 2023 position paper[34] and the Global Coalition for Animal Welfare, an industry-led working group of companies from across the supply chain.[35]

While the study commissioned by Metro informed the company's decision to diminish its policy and permit cages, Metro has not publicly released any details about it, nor relied on any contrary findings from non-industry funded research.

Retail Council of Canada (RCC)

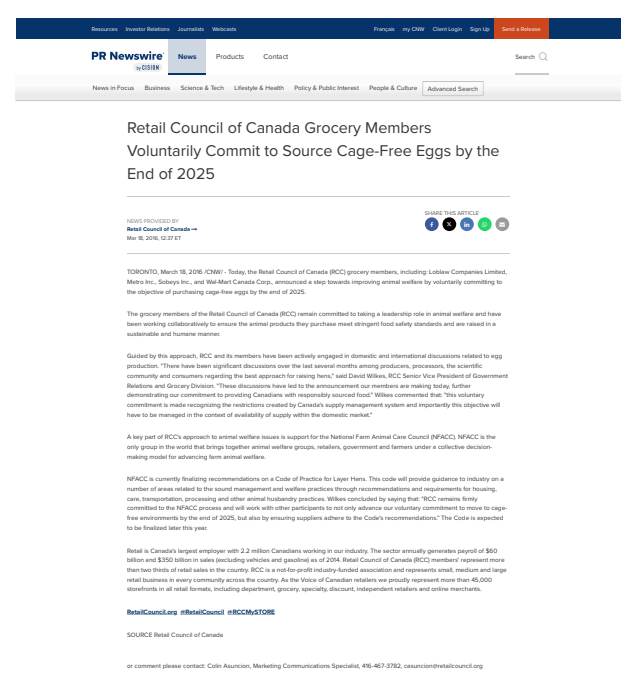
In another striking example of front group influence in Canada, the RCC, which brings together grocery retailers pre-competitively to advance their shared interests, backtracked on its animal welfare commitments in 2021. In a 2016 press release, the RCC published a voluntary commitment for all of Canada's major grocery stores "to move to cage-free environments by the end of 2025."[36] The Senior Vice President of Government Relations and the Grocery Division at the time, David Wilkes, specified that the RCC would remain firmly committed to both the NFACC process and to advancing the voluntary commitment of its members to go cage-free.

However, about halfway from 2016 to their 2025 policy deadline, these companies received requests from NGOs to begin publicly reporting progress toward their animal welfare commitments, at which point the RCC issued a statement that monumentally shifted the trajectory of banning cage confinement in Canada. Framed as "**renewing focus on animal welfare**," the statement read,

"RCC will pursue and make commitments solely through NFACC, thus removing previous commitments on sow housing and cage-free eggs..."[37] – Retail Council of Canada, 2021

Following Walmart's partnership with US CFI and subsequent cage-free backtracking in 2021, the RCC, a CCFI member, was now doing the same. The RCC's abandonment of its independent commitments effectively dismantled a framework for private sector leadership, rolling back the voluntary, market-driven standards that Canadian grocery stores had adopted to exceed baseline industry practices before the social license agenda took root in Canada.

Since the RCC claimed it would make commitments solely through NFACC, its members have not made a single animal welfare commitment nor reported any progress toward their cage-free commitments. The more closely companies—along with their institutional partners at NFACC and the RCC—adopt the marketing approach of front groups, the more they prop up the guise of regulation over meaningful animal welfare reform.


PR Newswire

Retail Council of Canada Grocery Members Voluntarily Commit to Source Cage-Free Eggs by the End of 2025

TORONTO, March 18, 2016 /CNW/ - Today, the Retail Council of Canada (RCC) grocery members, including: Loblaw Companies Limited, Metro Inc., Sobeys Inc., and Wal-Mart Canada Corp., announced a step towards improving animal welfare by voluntarily committing to the objective of purchasing cage-free eggs by the end of 2025.

The grocery members of the Retail Council of Canada (RCC) remain committed to taking a leadership role in animal welfare and have been working collaboratively to ensure the animal products they purchase meet stringent food safety standards and are raised in a sustainable and humane manner.

Guided by this approach, RCC and its members have been actively engaged in domestic and international discussions related to egg production. "There have been significant discussions over the last several months among producers, processors, the scientific community and consumers regarding the best approach for raising hens," said David Wilkes, RCC Senior Vice President of Government Relations and Grocery Division. "These discussions have led to the announcement our members are making today, further demonstrating our commitment to providing Canadians with responsibly sourced food." Wilkes commented that: "this voluntary commitment is made recognizing the restrictions created by Canada's supply management system and importantly this objective will have to be managed in the context of availability of supply within the domestic market."

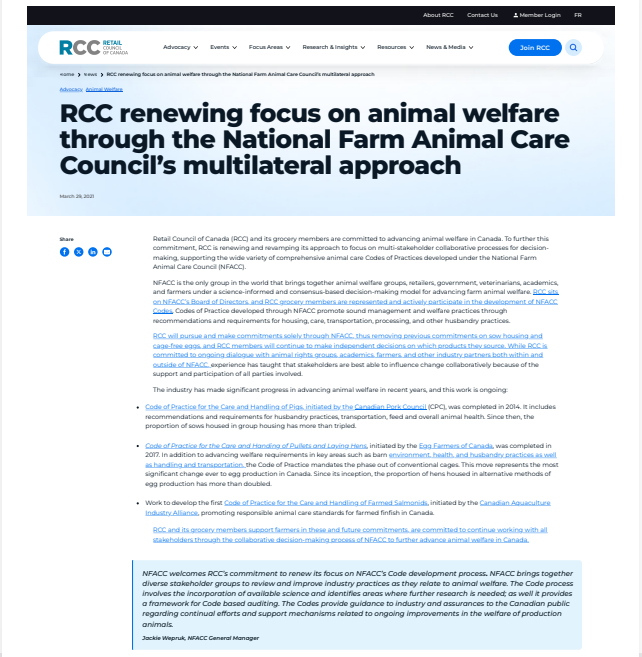
A key part of RCC's approach to animal welfare issues is support for the National Farm Animal Care Council (NFACC). NFACC is the only group in the world that brings together animal welfare groups, retailers, government and farmers under a collective decision-making model for advancing farm animal welfare.

NFACC is currently finalizing recommendations on a Code of Practice for Layer Hens. This code will provide guidance to industry on a number of areas related to the sound management and welfare practices through recommendations and requirements for housing, care, transportation, processing and other animal husbandry practices. Wilkes concluded by saying that: "RCC remains firmly committed to the NFACC process and will work with other participants to not only advance our voluntary commitment to move to cage-free environments by the end of 2025, but also by ensuring suppliers adhere to the Code's recommendations." The Code is expected to be finalized later this year.

Retail is Canada's largest employer with 2.2 million Canadians working in our industry. The sector annually generates payroll of $60 billion and $350 billion in sales (excluding vehicles and gasoline) as of 2014. Retail Council of Canada (RCC) members' represent more than two thirds of retail sales in the country. RCC is a not-for-profit industry-funded association and represents small, medium and large retail business in every community across the country. As the Voice of Canadian retailers we proudly represent more than 45,000 storefronts in all retail formats, including department, grocery, specialty, discount, independent retailers and online merchants.

RetailCouncil.org #RetailCouncil #RCCMySTORE

SOURCE Retail Council of Canada


RCC renewing focus on animal welfare through the National Farm Animal Care Council's multilateral approach

March 29, 2021

Retail Council of Canada (RCC) and its grocery members are committed to advancing animal welfare in Canada. To further this commitment, RCC is renewing and revamping its approach to focus on multi-stakeholder collaborative processes for decision-making, supporting the wide variety of comprehensive animal care Codes of Practices developed under the National Farm Animal Care Council (NFACC).

NFACC is the only group in the world that brings together animal welfare groups, retailers, government, veterinarians, academics, and farmers under a science-informed and consensus-based decision-making model for advancing farm animal welfare. RCC sits on NFACC's Board of Directors, and RCC grocery members are represented and actively participate in the development of NFACC Codes. Codes of Practice developed through NFACC promote sound management and welfare practices through recommendations and requirements for housing, care, transportation, processing, and other husbandry practices.

RCC will pursue and make commitments solely through NFACC, thus removing previous commitments on sow housing and cage-free eggs, and RCC members will continue to make independent decisions on which products they source. While RCC is committed to ongoing dialogue with animal rights groups, academics, farmers, and other industry partners both within and outside of NFACC, experience has taught that stakeholders are best able to influence change collaboratively because of the support and participation of all parties involved.

The industry has made significant progress in advancing animal welfare in recent years, and this work is ongoing:

- Code of Practice for the Care and Handling of Pigs, initiated by the Canadian Pork Council (CPC), was completed in 2014. It includes recommendations and requirements for husbandry practices, transportation, feed and overall animal health. Since then, the proportion of sows housed in group housing has more than tripled.
- Code of Practice for the Care and Handling of Pullets and Laying Hens, initiated by the Egg Farmers of Canada, was completed in 2017. In addition to advancing welfare requirements in key areas such as barn environment, health, and husbandry practices as well as handling and transportation, the Code of Practice mandates the phase out of conventional cages. This move represents the most significant change ever to egg production in Canada. Since its inception, the proportion of hens housed in alternative methods of egg production has more than doubled.
- Work to develop the first Code of Practice for the Care and Handling of Farmed Salmonids, initiated by the Canadian Aquaculture Industry Alliance, promoting responsible animal care standards for farmed finfish in Canada.

RCC and its grocery members support farmers in these and future commitments, are committed to continue working with all stakeholders through the collaborative decision-making process of NFACC to further advance animal welfare in Canada.

NFACC welcomes RCC's commitment to renew its focus on NFACC's Code development process. NFACC brings together diverse stakeholder groups to review and improve industry practices as they relate to animal welfare. The Code process involves the incorporation of available science and identifies areas where further research is needed; as well it provides a framework for Code based auditing. The Codes provide guidance to industry and assurances to the Canadian public regarding continual efforts and support mechanisms related to ongoing improvements in the welfare of production animals.

Jackie Wepruk, NFACC General Manager

In 2021 the Retail Council of Canada retreated from its own commitment to move to cage-free housing by 2025.

Summary

By hiding behind deceptive marketing, industry-run assurance programs, and NFACC's co-opted governance framework, major food companies are insulating themselves from public accountability. What companies frame as a renewed focus on animal care or a commitment to consumer choice is actually a significant abdication of responsibility for animal welfare in their supply chains. The backtracking of corporate animal welfare policies in Canada is not a matter of operational failure, but the outcome of a highly coordinated public relations strategy. This strategic shift highlights a severe decline in corporate leadership—a win for the agriculture front group approach to avoiding regulation—where progressive, voluntary ESG standards are being dismantled to protect industry self-regulation and avoid meaningful animal welfare reform.



Photo credit: Abigail Messier, We Animals

Conclusion

Today, with the Canadian animal agriculture sector investing millions of dollars into a growing network of front groups, third-party influencers, and public trust campaigns, the line between the reality of modern farming practices and corporate fiction has been increasingly blurred. This coordinated effort follows a strategic playbook that begins with selling the "public trust" framework to stakeholders as a defensive strategy and creating new organizations and alliances to advance it. This expansion allowed the sector to secure significant government and private funding, which is then used to pull in a broader membership base—moving from core industry associations to individual producers and major food companies. This unified front allows the sector to broadcast a singular, polished message that masks a more regressive agenda. Once entrenched, these groups work to backtrack on existing progressive policy commitments and diminish all forms of independent regulation in favor of industry-led standards.

By adopting the public relations and disinformation tactics pioneered in the U.S. and long used by other troubled industries, the Canadian animal agriculture sector has sought to buffer its intensive farming practices against the public's growing demand for transparency, sustainability, and meaningful welfare reform. As long as the increasingly coordinated web of covert, industry-sponsored communications remains unchecked, it threatens to stall momentum toward a more compassionate and accountable food system.



 Photo credit: Jo-Anne McArthur, We Animals (Ontario)

Recommendations

Identify

Distinguish Messengers: Differentiate between industry-funded spin and information from trusted academic institutions and non-profit organisations working for the public good.

Challenge Expertise: Proactively get to know food-industry PR tactics and Canada's front groups and marketing agencies.

Watch for Media Appearances: Look for industry groups and representatives appearing in media and at events under the guise of independent expertise, and sponsored news stories and content appearing as organic coverage.

Challenge

Rigorous Scrutiny: Confront misleading industry messages and the credibility of their messengers using material from investigations and independent sources, and encourage government officials to evaluate the efficacy of "public trust" marketing.

Direct Engagement: Write to media outlets when front groups and marketing agencies are portrayed as independent sources in news stories.

Counter with Evidence: Provide the media and the public with clear, science-based evidence regarding the negative impacts of industrial animal agriculture.

Expose

Investigative Reporting: Call on journalists and media outlets to attend industry events, examine industry communications materials, and reveal hidden conflicts of interest and US influence within Canada's animal agriculture sector.

Transparency of Interests: Share and comment on stories by, and that reference, industry groups to explain their hidden agenda or front group status.

Call Out Tactics: Explicitly name and describe front group PR tactics and humanewashing.

Replace

Centre the Public Good over Corporate Interests: Direct the public toward information sources without industry ties, and that focus on improving animal welfare conditions.

Foster Honest Conversation and Shared Goals: Replace industry spin with real stories, ensuring that discussions of animal welfare policy are working toward public accountability and oversight.

Build Capacity: Support organisations, advocates, and journalists to expand their ranks and their reach to address corporate power over Canada's food system.



"To make sound decisions about food and farming — from consumer decisions about food to public policies that will determine the future of our food system — it is essential to be able to separate industry spin from science and PR campaigns from public education."[38]— Spinning Food, Friends of the Earth

 Photo credit: Jo-Anne McArthur, We Animals

Appendices



Photo credit: Jo-Anne McArthur, We Animals

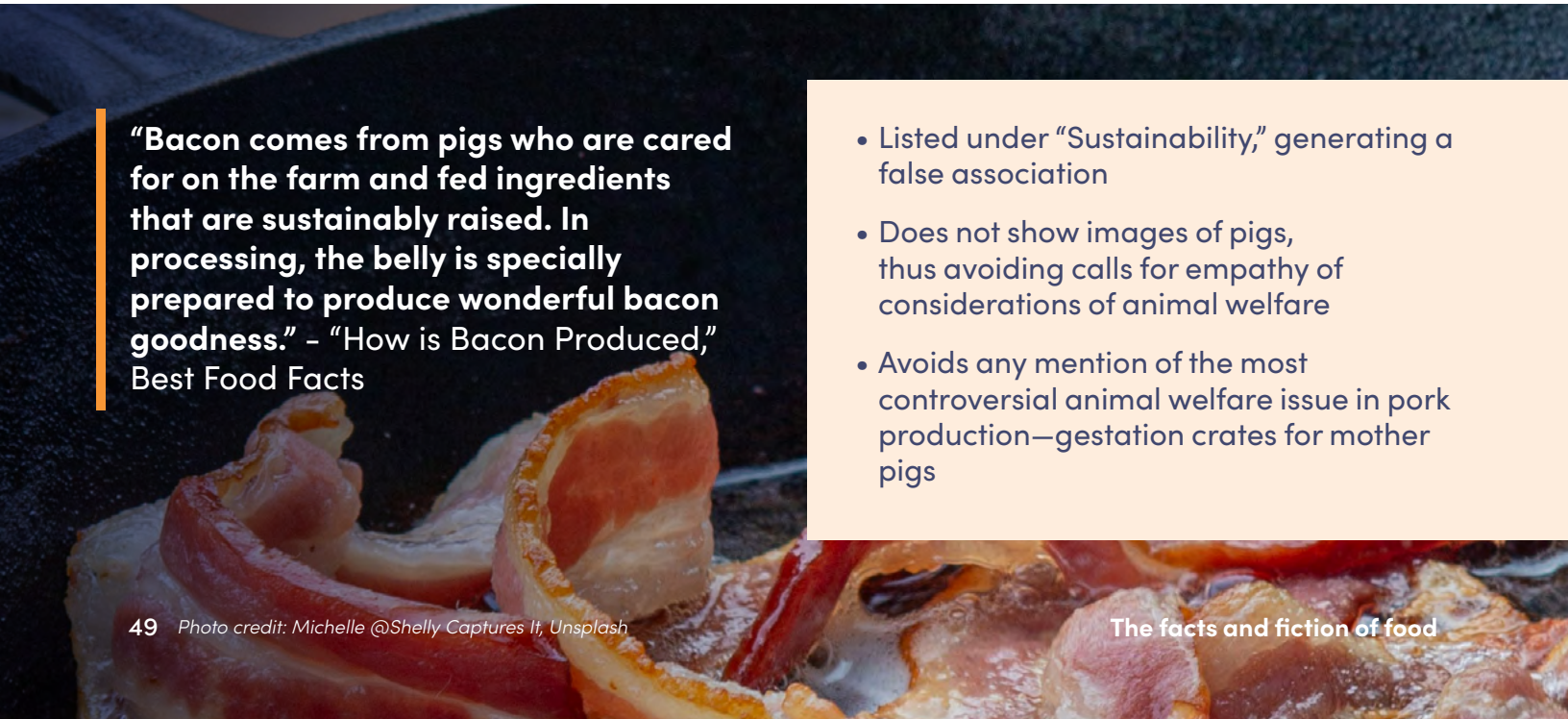
Appendix A

CASE STUDY

American Front Group Campaign Profile: "Best Food Facts"

Agriculture front groups often run campaigns and launch informational websites designed to appear as though they originate from trustworthy messengers such as farmers or consumers. The information that they provide is exclusively positive, and promotes industry interests.

What they say...	What's true
Consumer-run "We are consumers with a passion for food and our mission is to bring you objective, fact-based information about food... We're consumers, we have families, and we eat!"[1]	**Front-group-run** Best Food Facts is a campaign by The Center for Food Integrity. The program tracks online conversations and monitors news coverage of topics related to food and health.
Expert scientists "We have enlisted the help of more than 200 food system experts — ranging from university-based scientists to the Registered Dietitian community to the farmers themselves where the food cycle begins — who understand the science behind what's in your food and what it means for your health."[2]	**Industry funded spokespeople** Examples of funders of "experts" cited about bacon and eggs: • National Pork Board • The Livestock and Meat Industry Council • American Meat Science Association • U.S. Poultry & Egg Association



"Bacon comes from pigs who are cared for on the farm and fed ingredients that are sustainably raised. In processing, the belly is specially prepared to produce wonderful bacon goodness." - "How is Bacon Produced," Best Food Facts

- Listed under "Sustainability," generating a false association
- Does not show images of pigs, thus avoiding calls for empathy of considerations of animal welfare
- Avoids any mention of the most controversial animal welfare issue in pork production—gestation crates for mother pigs

 Photo credit: Michelle @Shelly Captures It, Unsplash

Appendix B

CASE STUDIES

1. Marketing Agency Profile: Chicken Farmers of Canada (CFC)

The Chicken Farmers of Canada (CFC) is a longstanding member of CCFI, and one of Canada's largest and most influential marketing agencies. It has been at the forefront of industry marketing for the past decade and has a history of disparaging advocates that work to improve animal welfare.

EXAMPLE 1:

"Know the Facts – Recent Vegan Activist Claims Are Misleading and Misguided" (2017)

Throughout the 2010s, undercover footage of farmed animal abuse by groups like Mercy for Animals Canada (MFAC) was often paired with pressure campaigns on restaurant, retail and food service industries to adopt better standards. In 2017, CFC and the Canadian Poultry and Egg Processors Council reacted with a strategic response piece, "Know the Facts - Recent Vegan Activist Claims Are Misleading and Misguided."

CFC's response reflects the same tactics used by CCFI and other front groups. Similar to CCFI's animal care review panel reports, CFC attempted to vilify and discredit animal advocacy groups. Like CCFI's Insight Reports and other communications focusing on damage control, it also advised industry members to direct the public's attention to what it claimed to be the benefits of chicken production.

This common strategy of "Deny, Attack, Reverse Victim and Offender" is sometimes referred to more specifically as "DARVO." While the DARVO model was initially developed by psychologist Dr. Jennifer Freyd to address interpersonal abuse dynamics, it has more recently emerged as a useful framework to understand how those in power deflect accountability by presenting themselves as the victim, and labeling advocates as the aggressors or purveyors or misinformation.[1]

"Chicken Farmers of Canada effectively administers the only Animal Care Program that reaches all 2,800 chicken farms in Canada... It is based on the Code of Practice developed by the National Farm Animal Care Council (NFACC). NFACC is a world leader in bringing together stakeholders with different perspectives...

*The commitment of Canadian chicken partners to animal welfare recently became the **target** of a campaign... to **pressure** [food companies] through extortion of their brands into mandating changes to our practices... While **claiming** to be advocating change for the betterment of industry practices... the objective seems to be to make it **more difficult, more frustrating and more expensive** for chicken farmers to do their jobs... Canadians are starting to ask whether organizations like these are really seeking science-based evolution in the best interests of animal welfare, or just **trying to destroy** the livelihoods of Canada's farmers..."*[2]

Deny: Dismisses documented welfare concerns by labeling them "misleading" and "misguided." It asserts that its own self-regulated "Animal Care Program" and the NFACC process, in which CFC is among the 87 percent of members that represent industry, is the sole source of truth. This effectively denies that investigations have repeatedly found systemic animal suffering.

Attack: Shifts the focus from farming practices to the character of the critics, branding them as "vegan activists" with covert interests like "destroying the livelihoods of Canada's farmers." By framing advocates as motivated by causing harm, the industry attempts to discredit evidence without actually addressing the substance of the criticism.

Reverse Victim and Offender: The multi-billion dollar for-profit industry portrays itself as the victim of "misinformation" and "extortion" tactics. It casts advocates as the aggressors, claiming that the industry needs protection to defend itself against the very people seeking accountability for well-documented animal abuse.



Chicken Farmers of Canada
Les Producteurs de poulet du Canada

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Ottawa, ON K1R 7S8

1545 rue Carling Avenue
Ottawa, ON K1Z 8P9

Know the Facts – Recent Vegan Activist Claims Are Misleading and Misguided

About the Animal Care Program

Chicken Farmers of Canada effectively administers the only Animal Care Program that reaches all 2,800 chicken farms in Canada; no other program can achieve this reach.

This mandatory, enforced, and third-party-audited program has a credible, science-based foundation. It is based on the Code of Practice developed by the National Farm Animal Care Council (NFACC). NFACC is a world leader in bringing together stakeholders with different perspectives – farmers, veterinarians, processors, transporters, animal welfare associations, researchers, and provincial/federal governments – to develop robust and sound Codes of Practice.

NFACC's Code Development process involves a full scientific review which is used to draft the Code that then undergoes a public consultation process. In this way, all Canadians have an opportunity to contribute to the final Code. The NFACC process is a standard that is internationally recognized and applauded.

CFC's Animal Care Program is verified through a comprehensive third-party audit by NSF International, an internationally-recognized, third-party certification body, accredited by the American National Standards Institute to ISO 17065.

Recent Vegan Activist Activity

The commitment of Canadian chicken partners to animal welfare recently became the target of a campaign, specifically against restaurant and retail companies to pressure them through extortion of their brands into mandating changes to our practices.

While claiming to be advocating change for the betterment of industry practices, one such vegan activist group has publicly stated that it is "unabashedly a vegan organization." (National Post, *Mercy for Animals: Activists making a difference — or radicals distorting the truth?* - July 20, 2017). The objective seems to be to make it more difficult, more frustrating and more expensive for chicken farmers to do their jobs and ultimately, make it too expensive for consumers.

Canadians are starting to ask whether organizations like these are really seeking science-based evolution in the best interests of animal welfare, or just trying to destroy the livelihoods of Canada's farmers, and dictate what Canadians can and can't eat.

Slower-Growing Chickens – Are they really better?

Take so-called "slower-growing" chickens, for example. While vegan activist organizations claim that growing a different breed of chicken more slowly will result in improved welfare, there is very little evidence to support this.

In 2017, CFC and the Canadian Poultry and Egg Processors Council released *"Know the Facts – Recent Vegan Activist Claims Are Misleading and Misguided,"* relying on deceptive tactics identified in the DARVO model.

EXAMPLE 2:

"Chicken Welfare Roundup: Supporting you through animal welfare activist activities" (2021)

More recently CFC's antagonism towards animal advocates, and its reliance on the DARVO strategy, has had an impact on efforts between animal advocacy organizations and the industry to work together on improving animal welfare. This collaborative approach between NGOs and Environmental, Social and Governance (ESG) specialists at food companies had an established history of building bridges and advancing shared priorities.

In 2021, MFAC reached out to food companies regarding the implementation of their longstanding animal welfare commitments, such as policies to phase out cages for laying hens and crates for mother pigs from their supply chains. MFAC offered policy recommendations for priority animal welfare topics as part of the food sector's growing ESG portfolios. It was at this time that CFC put out a series of digital ads in Canadian Grocer, which coincided with food companies beginning to backtrack on their public animal welfare commitments. Notably, CFC chose to use the blue-and-orange brand colours of MFA in place of its own red-and-white Canadian branding in these ads.

The ads were framed as guidance on how to handle animal advocacy groups from then CFC Director of Brand and Communications, Lisa Bishop-Spencer, now Executive Director of CCFI. Reflecting the impact of CCFI's advice to its membership, the ads claimed to offer support to the industry in response to animal activists contacting retailers and restaurants trying to "push their agendas." It referred to CFC's own prepared document that food companies could request if contacted by activists, providing advice on how to respond to specific "claims." It advised companies to contact CFC before engaging with activists, providing information, or making any business changes or commitments.



Chicken Farmers of Canada, "Don't Reinvent the Wheel" (2021), Canadian Grocer E-Newsletter.



 Photo credit: Abigail Messier, We Animals

2. Marketing Agency Profile: Egg Farmers of Canada (EFC)

The Egg Farmers of Canada (EFC) has explicitly adopted CCFI's social license agenda. In its 2024 Annual Report, EFC included a chapter titled, "Social License and Public Trust."[3] The chapter summarizes EFC's marketing campaigns and charitable work, its efforts to leverage media to demonstrate its "rigorous animal welfare standards," and its political advocacy and lobbying. These three priorities essentially lay out the front group playbook for maintaining the industry's social license to operate by influencing public perception through positive marketing, controlling the narrative through favourable media coverage, and lobbying to secure political influence.

Like the CFC, the EFC has also sought to undermine the corporate animal welfare policies that food companies adopted in collaboration with NGOs. Despite an industry-wide commitment to phase out conventional battery cages by 2036 and corporate policies by over 100 Canadian food companies to source exclusively "cage-free" eggs by 2025, Canada's egg industry has continued to invest in new cages.

Phasing out conventional battery cages has largely meant a move towards "enriched" cages, which provide minimal welfare improvements. In 2023, the trade publication Manitoba Cooperator covered a public opinion survey conducted by Bryant Research that showed strong support in Canada for a national ban on cage confinement altogether.[4] EFC Chair Roger Pelissero responded by attempting to discredit Bryant Research, and extolling the virtues of Canada's farming practices and the egg industry's commitment to the wellbeing of animals and consumers. He referred to the egg industry's "substantial progress...in our commitment to phasing out conventional cages and moving to alternative methods of production." Pelissero did not identify that the "alternative methods" were more cages.[5]

This pattern of deflection and distraction continued into 2024 when an opinion piece in the National Observer criticized the corporate sponsorship of the gala dinner at the annual BC Egg Conference,[6] Pelissero published the letter, "Canadians have trust in egg farmers and their practices."[7] And in 2025, when the issue escalated into the largest corporate cage-free campaign in Canadian history, another opinion piece in the Winnipeg Free Press, "Cruel to be caged: Calling 'fowl' on Big Egg,"[8] was followed with a letter from Pelissero, "Animal care is our top priority."[9]



3 Social license and public trust

It's a proud tradition to work with our fellow Canadians and share with them the many ways our sector contributes to the fabric of our country. From helping others learn about our approach to farming, to advocating in support of a strong domestic food system, to giving back to those around us, we want Canadians to know egg farmers are there for them. Our outreach initiatives are designed to connect people to the farmers behind the food they trust and nurture support for our system of supply management. Our virtual content, spokespeople in the media, public relations initiatives and other engagement tactics are reaching millions of Canadians.

Amplifying our voice through advocacy

EFC continues to advance the interests of egg farmers through a tailored, multi-faceted advocacy program. This year we expanded our engagement through a strategic program that included spring and fall advocacy days where members of the EFC Executive Committee took part in a series of meetings with Members of Parliament (MPs) and Senators. These connections allowed us to discuss the files of importance to the

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3. Producer Marketing Profile: Burnbrae Farms

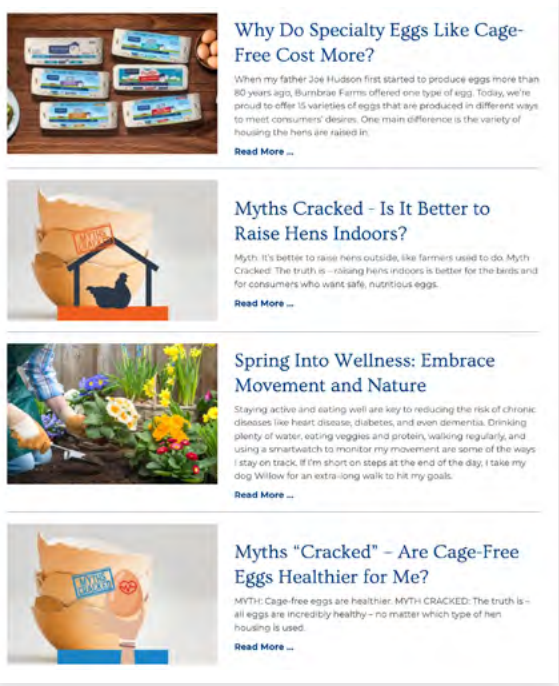
Burnbrae Farms is a major supplier to grocery stores across the country, and is the largest egg producer in Canada's highly concentrated egg duopoly, operating alongside L.H. Gray & Sons.

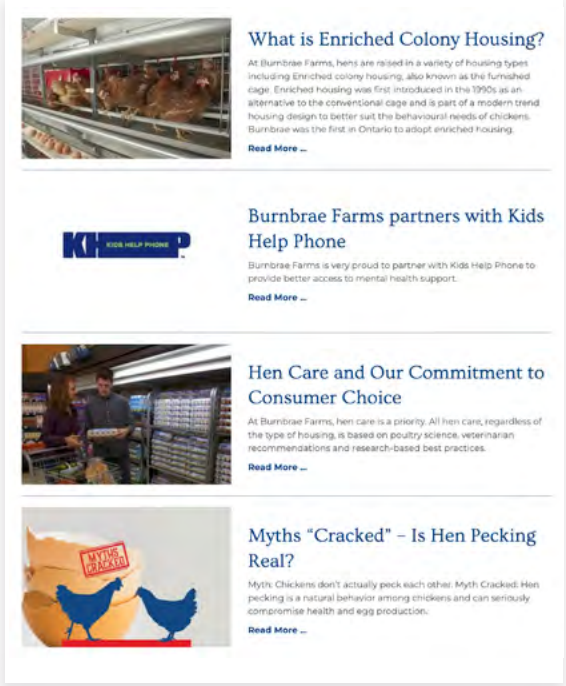
Both corporations rely heavily on industry-aligned groups like CCFI to manage their public relations. In 2024, Burnbrae Farms became the focus of a series of cage confinement public awareness campaigns organized by MFA, later joined by Animal Justice.

The day after Mercy For Animals launched the first of these campaigns, Burnbrae Farms published eight blogs, reposting them at various intervals over the next two years. They used an array of tactics designed to distract attention away from the harms of caged housing, and excuse their continued use. Some relied on the common tactic of providing facts in response to manufactured "myths." "Outstanding Hen Care and Our Commitment to Consumer Choice: The Right Thing to Do" justified the industry's use of cages by claiming a commitment to providing consumers with the opportunity to choose for themselves.[10] "Myth Cracked - Are Cage-Free Eggs Healthier for Me?" responded to the public's supposed belief that cage-free eggs are more nutritious.[11] In "Why Do Specialty Eggs Like Cage-Free Cost More?" Burnbrae President Margaret Hudson explained briefly that cage-free eggs cost more because the housing is more expensive before focussing again on the industry's commitment to choice.[12]

In a media interview about the MFA campaign, Hudson emphasized the industry's commitment to "alternative housing."[13] Like EFC Chair Roger Pelissero, Hudson failed to acknowledge that the industry's professed commitment to alternative housing simply meant a move away from battery to enriched cages, not a commitment to cage-free housing.

In 2024, Hudson spoke at the US CFI's annual Transparency Summit, confirming the reliance of Canada's egg industry on the crisis-management tactics promoted by CCFI. In her session, "Transparency in Action: Successes and Lessons Learned," Hudson concentrated on navigating crises, consumer expectations, and activist challenges.[14]





Since 2024 Burnbrae has published and revised a series of blogs designed to deflect criticism of cage confinement. Source: Burnbrae Farms blog

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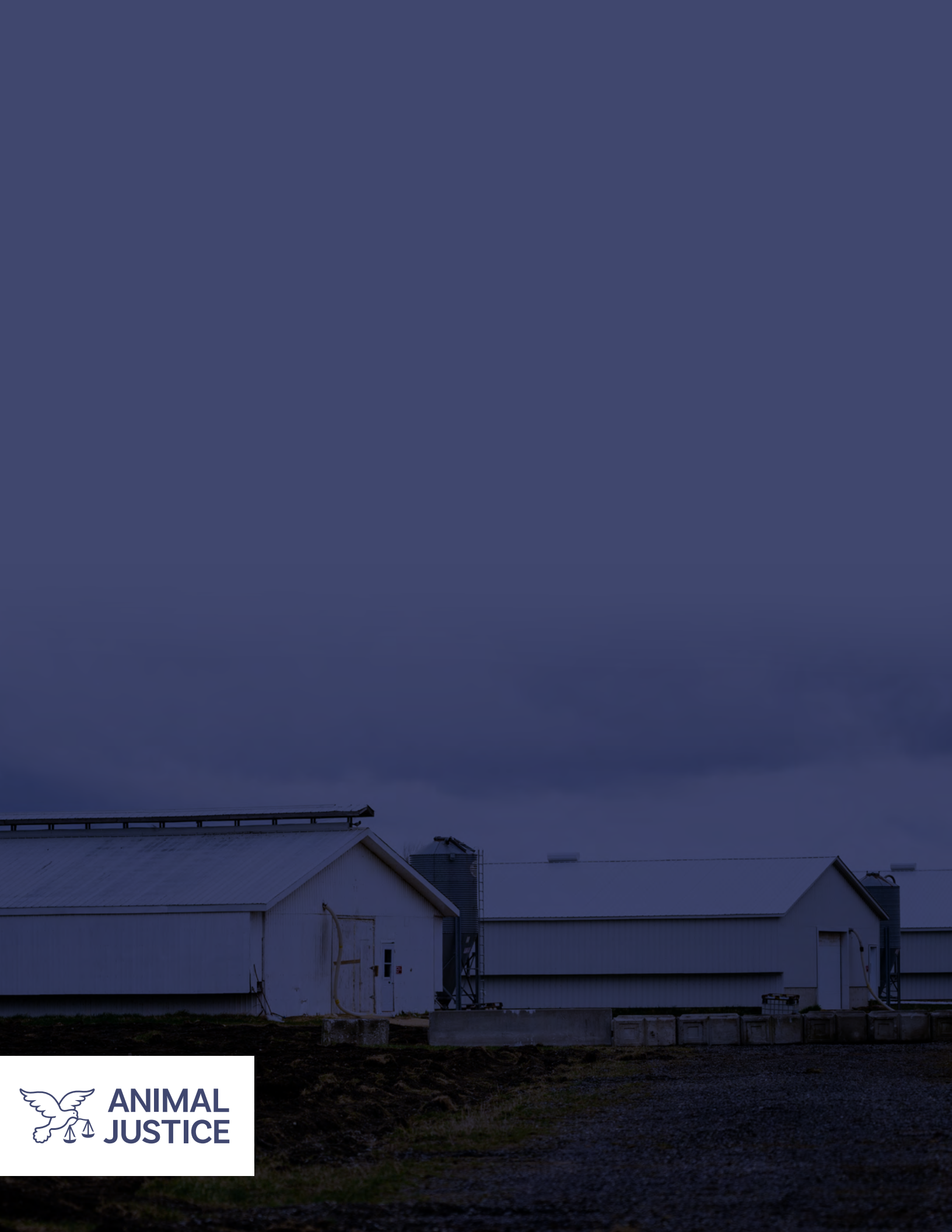
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