

MARCH 16, 2009

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

PRISON FARMS PUBLIC FORUM -- MARCH 19

A coalition of community groups will host a public forum on Thursday, March 19, in Kingston, Ontario, to discuss the announced closure of Canada's prison farms.

A panel, moderated by Susan Belyea of Loving Spoonful Cooperative Food Distribution, will include:
spokesperson, Correctional Services of Canada (CSC),
Peter Dowling, National Farmers Union Local 316
John Williamson, Frontenac Federation of Agriculture
Sandy Singers, Partners in Mission Food Bank
Randy Hillier, MPP
Scott Reid, MP

There will also be an opportunity for members of the public to ask questions and to leave written comments that will be submitted to Members of Parliament.

The event will be held on Thursday, March 19 at 7:30 p.m. at St Lawrence College (Davies Hall), 100 Portsmouth Avenue, Kingston and is open to all members of the public. The room is wheelchair accessible and on a public transit route.

Responding to media inquiries in February, CSC made its intentions to devolve its farming program known to the public. CSC stated that it is closing the farms because the skills gained by inmates do not lead to related employment.

Frontenac Institution, located along Bath Road within Kingston's urban area, is a tract of over 800 acres of the region's best farmland. For years, it has been cultivated by inmates, to feed the prison population in Ontario and Quebec.

Supporters of the program say the involvement in this work has increased self-esteem and self-worth, and enhanced rehabilitation. Inmates have learned and practised taking responsibility, being punctual and working in a team. They have learned mechanical skills and equipment operation in growing and processing farm products for themselves.

For the last 14 years, Pittsburgh Institution at Joyceville has housed a privately-operated abattoir which provides skills development and work experience for inmates. The business also provides essential infrastructure for the local food system with area farmers using the abattoir to process meat for local eaters and businesses.

Several groups are calling for a reversal of the decision to close the prison farms. If the closures go ahead, it will have implications for the local food system and for city planning.

Six agricultural programs across Canada will be phased out if CSC plans go ahead.

The meeting is a joint effort of local organizations: Frontenac Cattleman's Association, National Farmers Union Local 316, Urban Agriculture Kingston and Sisters of Providence Justice and Peace Office.

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