

To Whom It May Concern:

Please consider the following for publication as a letter to the editor:

The Harper government is moving to shut down prison farm programs across Canada. Typically, little thought is given in Ottawa to just how integrated prison farms are with their surrounding communities.

These Institutions provide jobs, good family-supporting jobs. And not just as guards. Hundreds of others are employed – teachers, administrative support workers, tradespeople, cooks, parole officers and many others. Then, there are the spin-off jobs created in local communities.

Correctional Service's farm programs are ideally placed to profit from several growing trends in agriculture and food processing. The first is an increasing 'green' concern for sustainable agriculture and organic food. The recent listeriosis crisis has provided impetus for a second trend: the so-called '100-mile diet' based on producing and consuming locally-grown food.

Thanks to the professionalism of the program teachers, foodstuffs produced through prison farm programs – whether, milk, beef, pork, or vegetables – are recognized as being of the highest quality.

Inmates enrolled in farm programs already donate the fruits of their labour to local community food banks and charities. Rather than eliminate these programs, the Harper government should be expanding prison farm programs to increase the availability of safe and secure local food.

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