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[Canada to shut down all prison farms](#)

Apr 10, 2009 by Kate Lunau



Like those of countless other farm workers, Danny Gallant's day would begin before dawn. As his co-workers tended to pigs, cattle and hens, he prepared cuts of meat from livestock. The farm where Gallant worked is typical in many ways—except it's on prison grounds, and all the farm workers are inmates. "I enjoyed going to work," says Gallant, who was recently released. "Being at the farm was awesome. I learned a lot."

Across Canada, six federal prisons operate functioning farms. About 300 inmates take part, doing everything from milking cows to fixing equipment to producing food that's fed to fellow offenders. This summer could be their last harvest: the government recently announced that Canada's prison farms will be shut down over the next two years. "We determined very few ex-inmates were obtaining work in agriculture," says Christa McGregor of the Correctional Service of Canada, adding that the CSC spends about \$4 million annually on the program.

The National Farmers' Union is urging the government to reconsider. Betty Brown, who sits on the NFU's board of directors, argues that agricultural skills are indeed in demand. By shutting down the farms, she says, "they're saying agriculture's not important." The union suggests the move may be a cash grab, as the CSC's farm properties in Ontario alone are reportedly worth \$2 million (CSC hasn't announced its plans for the land). Others note that the farms help inmates interact with the community, as their produce is often donated to local food banks.

But while Gallant says he learned useful skills on the prison farm, he admits it's now four months after his release and he has yet to find a job. The major hurdle, he believes, isn't his skill set—it's the stigma of having a criminal record. "It's not looking good for me," he says. "But that's another story."

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