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'Faintest glimmer of hope' that prison farm won't close

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By **Suzanne Atkinson**

OTTAWA- The committee working to save Canada's prison farm has invited public safety minister Peter Van Loan to join a tour of Kingston's Frontenac dairy farm later this year.

And they say there was the faintest glimmer of hope that the Kingston facility might not close, when they met with the minister recently.

MP Scott Reid, who attended the meeting, told them the prisons in the east and west "without a doubt are closing."

"But we didn't get many significant signs of support," a Frontenac Cattlemen's director said.

They're hoping that if Van Loan tours the facility, the minister will gain a better understanding of its value.

"He didn't get the message of the transferable skills. He heard, but he didn't understand," Jeff Peters said after the meeting.

Five representatives, with copies of AgriNews articles on the impact of the prison farm closures in hand, met with the minister and Reid to vocalize their plea.

"These skills are very transferable," Peters said.

An aid told the group that each federal department is expected to cut five per cent of its budget annually.

But they're arguing that for every dollar spent on programming, \$4 is saved in future expenditures on recidivism.

"We requested three things," Peters, a director and past president, of the Frontenac Cattlemen's Association said. The group requested that the minister "see it before he goes any further." They also requested a cost analysis of the Frontenac Pen Farm. And they requested another meeting with the minister in early fall.

Joining Peters in the meeting were Andrew McCann of Urban Agriculture Kingston, Dianne Dowling of the National Farmers Union and Bridget Doherty of the Sisters of Providence of St. Vincent de Paul.

"He didn't respond very much other than to ask if we have inmates working on our farms."

McCann said there was some "argument," about the profitability of the Frontenac facility which houses a dairy and egg operation and processes milk, eggs and juice for distribution in 14 federal corrections facilities, and rates in the top 10 per cent of Ontario's herd in Dairy Herd Improvement's herd management audit.

"If the farms were able to turn a profit we would see some reconsideration," was the gist of one exchange they had with the minister.

The group met later with members of opposition parties who claim to support the federal penal agricultural program.

"They're going to try to help us in the sense that they're going to ask about the \$4 million (cost of operating the six prison farms) in the House of Commons so we can get some answers," Peters said.

The campaign has now gone national with a website, www.saveourfarms.ca, launched by members of the Union of Solicitor General [Employees](#) (USGE-PSAC) who oversee, instruct and work with inmates in federal prison farm programs.

"We're going to keep trying to grow this campaign," Peters said.

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