



delicious western canadian  
post-collapse prosperity  
est. 2009

Government of Canada to close Ontario prison farms, end rehabilitation program

by Ryan Slifka on Monday, March 2nd, 2009

in Agricultural Policy & Production, Food, Institutions

According to CBC News, the federal government has announced that the country's prison farm system will be phased out, starting with the closing of two prisons in the Kingston, Ontario area. All six farms will be phased out over the next two years, said a government spokesperson, claiming that the farms are no longer a viable form of rehabilitation.

Agricultural skills are no longer deemed necessary, according to Corrections Canada. "Employment-related skills are major factors in an offender's ability to pursue a crime-free life," said a spokesperson.

However, not everyone agrees with the decision to close the farms. Liberal agriculture critic Wayne Easter accused the Conservatives of selling off government assets as a short-sighted attempt to cover up fiscal mismanagement:

"The productive value of these farms down the next 40 years would be quite substantial and they're going to sell them off today when assets are selling at low prices for a little bit of cash... to cover up their mismanagement and really deny inmates of the future to have this experience."

Easter's accusations have plenty of merit. In 2007 a panel put together by then-public safety minister Stockwell Day reported that the government could make upwards of 2 million dollars from the sale of the two Kingston properties alone—a hefty sum, indeed which could help the Conservatives keep their budget heads above water in the face of future deficits. The federal government, after all, will need plenty of funds to build new private prisons.

Prison farming provides a unique experience indeed. The two farms slated to close near Kingston provide 110 inmates the chance to learn small-scale farming skills. This morning CBC radio ran a story where local prison officials and inmates discussed the therapeutic value of the farming operations, who both agreed that the farm work helped to lessen behavioral problems and gave inmates exposure to regimentation of a normal work day.

The skills are put towards operating a self-sufficient local food system for the prison itself. Not only that, but the farms provide a public service by providing locally grown produce and protein to the general public as well as other prisons. Localization and small-scale production appears to be a happy byproduct of the farm prison program. This is yet another move by the Conservatives that shows their lack of commitment to a safe, local and self-sufficient food system in Canada. If people who are working for virtually nothing are given the chance to provide for themselves, where do the rest of us stand?

Yet, judging from the statements by Corrections Canada on the practical usefulness of the skills gained at the farms are no longer applicable in the modern job market—despite the fact that all Canadians eat and that in 2005

agriculture accounted for 8% of Canada's GDP and provided 2.1 million jobs. Then again, local agriculture and self-sufficiency doesn't do much for potential shareholders and certainly doesn't do anything at all for Bayer Cropscience, Cargill or Archer-Daniels-Midland.

Which skills would the federal government rather see imparted in inmates? Seeing as how manufacturing is in a deep decline, construction is grinding to a halt and callcentres are outsourced one-by-one. Yet, people will continue to eat in a recession (depression?) while accessibility and affordability declines with lost jobs and lost wages. And the Harper government, God bless them, will probably be eating crow instead.