



For Immediate Release

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Ontario government putting food safety at risk -- Peters

QUEEN'S PARK – Ontario's abattoirs have been operating without proper inspections since March, Liberal Agriculture Critic Steve Peters revealed today.

There are five veterinarians responsible for auditing the 204 provincially licensed abattoirs in Ontario. They ensure the abattoirs are in compliance with the Meat Inspection Act, including

- waste handling and disposal;
- water sanitation;
- equipment and maintenance;
- pest control;
- temperature control; and
- hygiene.

This system has been put entirely on hold since March while Agriculture Minister Helen Johns sat on a request for proposal (RFP) to deliver the abattoir audit program.

The RFP was not issued till May 15, a full six weeks after the veterinary auditors' contracts ran out in March. New agreements won't be approved till June 23. The RFP document even states these veterinarians "may be required to deal with very significant food safety issues."

"Why is it, Minister, that you are allowing our abattoirs to go without proper audits for the entire first quarter of operations?" Peters questioned Johns.

This information comes while the Ontario livestock industry is facing a serious crisis with the U.S. border shut down to exports as a result of the BSE case in Alberta. Ontario abattoirs have now gone without veterinary supervision over three of their busiest months of the year, putting the safety of this province's meat at risk.

"The RFP has been sitting on your desk, waiting for your approval and signature since January and you have done nothing," Peters charged Johns. "Minister, why have you been sitting on your hands and jeopardizing the safety of our food by allowing the 204 abattoirs in this province to have no veterinary audit for three entire months?"

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