



The Real Beef

A Bulletin for Ontario 'contract' Meat Inspectors

May 2003. #1

Meat Inspectors pull together a new campaign

Meat inspectors want their wages and working conditions improved. The demands are clear: a wage increase, travel time covered, mileage costs covered, and benefits. "Contract" meat inspectors should not be treated any differently than the full-time, permanent meat inspectors.

Those are the conclusions from two information meetings held over the last month. Independent 'contract' meat inspectors came together in Guelph and Trenton to talk about their concerns. Reps. from the Ontario Public Service Employees Union (OPSEU) provided background information and up-dates on actions that have been taken. Everyone who attended said "Let's *do* something about our situation!"

Here is what was said:

- Inspectors deserve respect - we are the front line of defense in Ontario's food safety system.
- Inspectors haven't seen a pay raise in 10 years. More work has been added to jobs with no extra compensation.
- Inspectors don't get paid for all of the time on the job.
- The turnover rate is too high - 32% per year.
- There is a lack of training and not enough training hours.
- Each inspector is treated differently by each area manager and that means unequal and uneven treatment. For example, some get their laundry or travel paid for and others don't.
- Transportation costs are going through the roof and its time that inspectors were paid for all their travel.

- Treatment should be equal for all meat inspectors, whether they are 'contract' or permanent.
- An OPSEU policy grievance has been filed on the status of 'contract' meat inspectors.

Some inspectors have heard *rumours* for many months that a wage increase is coming soon, but there has been nothing in writing. Some inspectors have taken action already. A group wrote to the Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs, but the Minister did not provide answers. Others have been told by Dr. Tom Baker that the Branch is pulling together a new human resources plan. Inspectors said they have been studied at least three times and told for over three years that a new plan was coming! In other words, there has been no real response—just more waffling by the Branch.

What about our legal status?

"Contract" meat inspectors have been found to be 'employees' by both Revenue Canada and by the Ministry of Labour. "Contract" inspectors are employees of the Crown (i.e. employed by the provincial government). They, however, are not appointed by the Lieutenant-Governor as Crown employees (unlike the permanent meat inspectors). This difference in wording actually signifies an important distinction in your rights. The "contract" employees are denied the right to union representation.

With the stroke of a pen, the Minister could change this. In the meantime, inspectors can continue to come together as an informal organization. Our right to freedom of association without fear of reprisal from the employer is part of the Canadian Constitution.

A time for action

The meat inspectors campaign is underway!

Everyone agreed that it is time for “contract” meat inspectors to work together and support each other. Our goal is to improve “contract” meat inspectors wages and working conditions.

Making the issues faced by meat inspectors more visible to the public was the No. 1 priority. Many ideas were discussed. We reviewed who our potential allies might be in a campaign to improve wages and working conditions. The initial campaign steps include mailing postcards to the Minister and a lobby of local MPPs. Other events are proposed for the upcoming months.

Action you can take

1. Send a postcard to Minister Helen Johns

Have friends, family and neighbours sign and send a support card to Helen Johns, Minister of Agriculture Food and Rural Affairs. Cards are enclosed in this mail-out.

2. Talk to your plant manager.

Some felt that their plant manager would be supportive of the campaign. Abattoir managers want to see stability in the system too. Enclosed in this mailing is a sample letter that your plant manager could send to Minister Helen Johns. If you think your plant manager may be supportive of the campaign, start by explaining your situation. Give them a copy of the enclosed sample letter and

encourage them to write directly to the Minister as soon as possible.

3. Lobby your MPP.

Call or visit your local MPP. Tell them your concerns. Give them a copy of the pamphlet that explains the situation of meat inspectors in Ontario.

Lobbying provides your MPP with important information about your situation. Most MPPs won't know the details about the food safety system unless you outline it for them. According to Brian Burdick in Peterborough, all it took was a simple phone call. Brian made it clear to Gary Stewart, his local MPP, that meat inspectors have said 'enough is enough' and they won't be going away.

Even if you live in the same area as other inspectors, contact your MPP. The more calls or visits the better.

4. Wear a sticker at the OMAFRA conference

Show your support for meat inspectors by wearing a sticker at the OMAFRA Food Inspection conference. Distribute the stickers to others before the conference, or at the conference, and ask them to support us by wearing one.

5. Attend the next meat inspectors meeting

Find out more about the meat inspectors' campaign. What are the next steps we should take to improve our wages and working conditions?

Saturday May 31, 2003 at 3 p.m.

(just after the OMAFRA Food Inspection Branch conference).

Red Pine Inn, Alliston, Ontario

For further information contact:

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'Contract' Meat Inspector's Information Meeting

Find out more about the campaign

Saturday May 31, 2003

Red Pine Inn

497 Victoria St. E.

Alliston, Ontario

(West of the Nottawasaga Conference Centre)

3 p.m. – 4:30 p.m.

(just after the OMAFRA Food Inspection Branch conference)

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