

FOOD SAFETY, TRACEABILITY AND PUBLIC HEALTH

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ABSTRACT

The contemporary reality of food, farming and animal use is a result of changing relationships between the state, the market and civil society. Recent changes have resulted from pressures caused by processes of globalization, industrialization, privatization and individualization; collectively modernization. Most western democratic governments have been withdrawing regulatory and financial support from Agriculture most dramatically since the formation of the World Trade organization in 1994. Modernization of agriculture policy is eroding prior relationships between the State, the Markets and Civil Society and new policy arrangements are required to respond to current needs. Developing a policy arrangement for new areas of agricultural responsibility is difficult and demanding. This paper describes basic types of policy arrangement, some examples of their evolution, their success or failure and a possible framework to understand current events.

INTRODUCTION

Policy arrangements are nebulous constructs, difficult to identify and more difficult to objectively criticise, partly because policy arrangements are the structure in which we carry on day to day living. According to the webpage [<http://www.londonswineconference.ca/>], the London Swine Conference is a technology transfer conference coordinated by the Ontario Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs, Ontario Pork, Ontario Pork Industry Council and University of Guelph. This statement and the existence of this conference imply that there is a local “policy coalition” of members drawn from the sectors of the State, the Markets and Society that share a commitment to “technology transfer”. This conference also implies that this policy coalition perceive “technology transfer” is a significant common good, which they will cooperate with other like minded organizations to facilitate the delivery of.

In modern agriculture the ideas of common good provided by food safety, traceability and public health are driving the formation of other “policy coalitions” who share a common interest in the development and delivery in these policy arenas. There are other policy coalitions, however, interested in other components of agriculture such as the welfare of animals used in livestock production and the environmental externalities of livestock production. The principals described in this paper also apply to those anti-agriculture policy domains. This paper will review some theory of policy governance and provide examples to help understand these broad concepts. In the last section, ideas of future possible directions will be presented.

BACKGROUND

For centuries, the world has been divided into sovereign Nation States, most of which in the last 100 years pursued a national policy of self-sufficiency in food production. The most dominant pillar of national agriculture policy was an ongoing goal to be independent of the food supply of other countries. To reach this goal, most nations subsidized agricultural food production where under-producing sectors were encouraged, and overproduction was paid for by the government or was exported, where necessary, supported by export subsidy. Catastrophic world wars and resultant food shortages solidified food security as a core national program. Farmers in most countries up until the recent past have been buffered somewhat from volatility of the market: everything they produced was bought by somebody (overproduction mostly by the state).

Agri-Ideology

After WWII society communicated its continued support for this food security policy goal by continuing to elect governments that pursued this agenda. Western society believed in “agrarian particularism”, that is agriculture was different from other economic activities such as logging, mining and the automotive industry. The food supply was very important to society, however; farming was limited to family farms which were non-cohesive family businesses and could not provide the preconditions for modernization of agriculture. Modernization of agriculture required capital for infrastructure, research and development, extension and assistance especially to new producers both home grown and immigrant. In addition, widespread bankruptcies in a sector that contained a significant proportion of the population, such in the years between the great wars, could lead to considerable social unrest. Climate conditions such as drought and the “dust bowl” of the ‘30s were beyond the control of the individual farmer and beyond the risk management of private industry. These and many other public sentiments provided an ideology to justify special government intervention and assistance in agriculture.

The attitude of the US population to agriculture was also flavoured by an additional belief that the best characteristics of the American culture and individual Americans was from working the land, and the best American citizens were farmers.

Recent Structural and Social Change

During the last two decades, dramatic changes in the social, political and economic environments have had considerable impacts on the society’s and the consumers’ view on agriculture, government support of agriculture, food and on the way food, especially foods of animal origin, are produced. No longer does even a small proportion of citizens regularly experience agriculture environment, and agriculture production is dwarfed by many other economic sectors.

In addition to general trends in society, many specific events that had and still have an indirect or direct impact on the production of food with or from animals are:

- The BSE, Avian Influenza and FMD outbreaks in UK and Europe resulted in the massive killing of animals and a growing suspicion in the public that something essential to modern industrial food production was fundamentally wrong, wrong to animals, wrong to the

environment, contrary to the nature of food, and contrary to the human-animal contract upon which pastoral, agrarian and modern society had developed and flourished.

- The emergence of H₅N₁ poultry-human influenza in Hong Kong, recent emergence of “swine flu” in Mexico possible swine-human variant.
- The breakdown of the communistic block in the late 80’s and early 90’s, with free-market principles (neo-liberalism) replacing plan-economy prescriptions. This contagious Thatcherism has initiated the globalization of almost all economies especially in agriculture trade.
- The creation of the WTO (World Trade Organization) replacing the GATT (General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade) in 1994, leading to a growing liberalization of the trade in food and raw materials for food including animals and animal products:
 - led to the fact that food retailers and grocery chains can theoretically buy any food from anywhere in the world, and national food supplies are not any longer something that retailers are dependent on.
 - led to the fact that food producers/processors and retailers can buy (where the consumer discriminates) on qualities other than price like “freely traded” or eco-friendly products.
 - emerging oligopolists such as Wal-Mart, demanding large volume of standardized produce at cut throat prices greatly decreasing the margins available to producers, especially small producers.
 - Group actions like the “Battle in Seattle” bringing international trade policy and agriculture policy into the living room.
- The enlargement of the EU on May 1, 2004 with 10 new EU members emphasized a new trend in blocking of the globe into trading blocs as opposed to trading nations.
- In Europe there has been increased politicization and market action of the “ideas” related to GMO’s (genetically manipulated organisms) in plant production, and animal welfare in livestock production.

North America, by serendipity has been spared the brunt of the majority of the critical issues that have affected Europe. Notable exceptions have been the BSE scare, environmental concerns related to concentrated livestock feeding operations and, most recently, movements to regulate livestock production methods at the State (sub-national) level in the USA.

Today there are two major pressures at the foundational level of agriculture production:

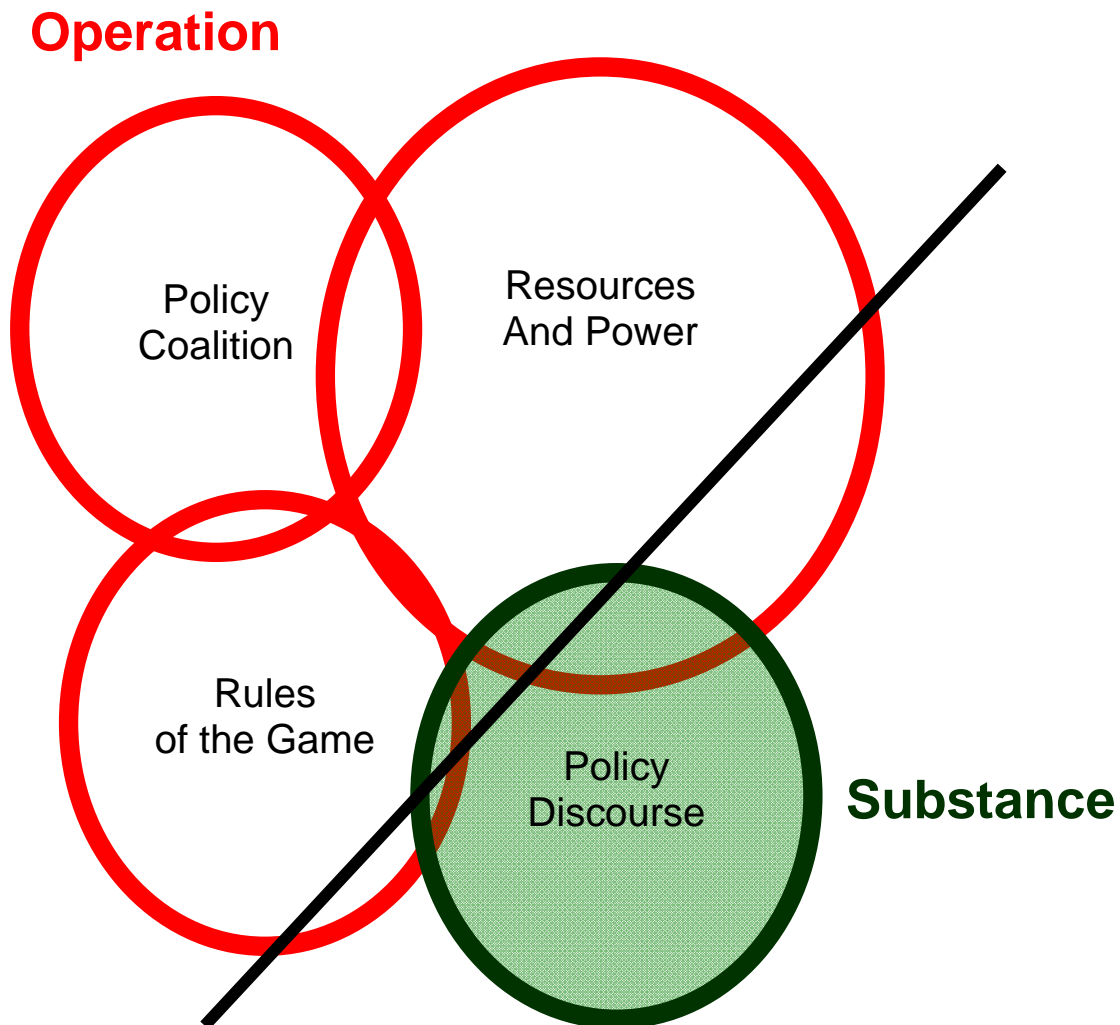
1. International trade agreements and general neo-liberal beliefs that the markets are all knowing and government participation is evil are driving an agenda of withdrawal-of-the-state from agriculture policy.
2. A growing desire by society to participate in the production of the food they consume and to re-connect, scrutinize and make accountable those methods of production. Society has an opportunity to influence the methods of food production either through the markets or through the state.

WHAT IS A POLICY ARRANGEMENT?

In its simplest form, a policy arrangement is a goal or large project and the organization that delivers the goal; it consists of the substance and the delivery mechanism. A 'policy arrangement' refers to the temporary stabilization of the organization and substance of a policy domain at a specific level of policy making (Arts et al., 2000a,b) (Figure 1).

Figure 1. Visual representation of an existing policy arrangement.

A policy arrangement is a temporary stabilization between the operational components and the policy discourse which is the substance of the arrangement. Policy arrangements are temporary and subject to continual modification from improvement to abandonment or replacement by more politically astute arrangements.



The current Growing Forward, Federal-Provincial-Territorial agreement can be used to better understand the concept of a policy arrangement. Growing Forward is a five-year commitment by Canada's federal, provincial and territorial governments to support the development of a

profitable, innovative agri-food sector that is adept at managing risk and responsive to market demands [direct quote from <http://www.omafra.gov.on.ca/english/about/growingforward/index.htm>]. Those of us who work in this policy arrangement know it is a method of transferring money to farmers to reward behaviour that aligns with the program.

At the time the federal-provincial agreement is signed we can consider the policy arrangement **temporarily stabilized**. The rules of the game, that is what things are eligible for funding and what things are prohibited, and the process for accessing the financial support are all fixed. Also in the agreement the Resources and Power are clearly defined as government based, who will pay for what and how things are approved. However, prior to the establishment of the program and for a considerable period of time, pre-stabilization, there was jockeying within the Policy Coalition related to rules of the game and the distribution of power. Probably the jockeying is already underway for the next five year plan starting in 2013.

Understanding a Policy Arrangement by Conquest “BC Farm-Fresh Eggs”

Examining how policy arrangements are de-stabilized is probably more informative than trying to document how complex policies like the multi-year national agri-food policies are negotiated.

Ungraded eggs are eggs sold outside the supply managed system in Canada. These eggs have not been cleaned, processed, candled to identify and remove cracks for diversion to pasteurization and packed in new materials with a best before date, as is the case with graded eggs. These ungraded eggs are essentially untraceable. Most provinces allow the farm gate sale of ungraded eggs directly to the final residential consumer, a one-up-one-down sale in traceability language. When health inspection staff find ungraded eggs in restaurants or retail outlets the eggs are seized and destroyed, and the establishment may have other punitive measures applied.

On January 12, 2009, the Vancouver Island Health Authority directed their food safety inspection staff (Environmental Health Officers) to ignore the presence of ungraded shell eggs in retail environments, restaurants and food service institutions. This internal directive of the Health Authority instructs enforcement staff to not enforce the regulations under the BC Health Act related to shell egg sales. This action on the island occurred concurrent with a significant increase in human *Salmonella* Enteritidis infection on the mainland traced to ungraded hatching eggs (brown shelled) illegally exiting the broiler hatching egg industry.

Most sharp minds involved in food safety should be keen to understand how a health authority comes to the decision to circumvent their own well considered food safety regulations. On Vancouver Island, a “Policy Coalition” recruiting the policy discourse of “Farm-Fresh” was able to garner media support and build on the consumer belief in the “100 mile diet” and the “buy local” propaganda to circumvent the previous policy arrangement which placed food safety as the primary purpose of food regulations. In this localized policy arena, the political power responded to the belief that access to “local foods” was a greater good, than occasional human food borne salmonella was a public evil (Wilcott, 2009).

This example emphasizes that a “Policy Arrangement” is a temporary stabilization of the particular policy concern. New “Policy Coalitions” can emerge and engage in the Policy Discourse to drive the arrangement in a different or a new direction creating new rules of the game and recruiting the resources and power.

Probably the most remarkable new policy coalition to emerge in North America in the last 10 years is the Humane Society of United States (HSUS). This organization operates no animal shelters and rescues no animals; it is a pure political activist organization. This non profit organization has an annual budget of \$85,000,000 (HSUS, 2008) and has driven state level intervention in the methods of confinement of livestock in several States (Table 1).

Table 1. Recent legislative initiatives in the USA limit or protect livestock production.

State	Proponent - Target	Initiative	Law	Force (lag Y)
Florida ¹	HSUS – Sow Stalls	2002 Amendment 10	Fla. Const. art. 10, § 21	Dec 2008 (6)
Arizona ²	HSUS – Sow Crate Veal Calf	2006 Proposition 204	Ariz. Rev. Stat. §§ 13-2910.07 to 13-2910.08	Dec 2012 (6)
Oregon	Legislature – Sow Crates	2007 SB 694,	Or. Rev. Stat. §600.150	Jan 2012 (5)
Colorado	HSUS – Sow Crate Veal Calf	2008 SB 201	Colo. Rev. Stat. §§ 35-50.5-101 to 103	Jan. 2012 calves (4) and Jan. 2018 sows (10)
California	HSUS – Veal, egg production, foie gras	2008 Proposition 2	Cal. Health & Safety Code, Division 20, Chapter 13.8 Me. Rev. Stat. Ann.	Jan 2015 (6)
Maine	HSUS – Veal, Gestation Stalls	2009 LD 1021	tit. 7 §4020 17 §1039	Jan 2011 (3)
Michigan	HSUS – Veal, egg Gestation Stalls	2009 House bills 5127 and 5128	MI Rev. Stat. §287.746	Oct 2012, Calves (3) Oct 2019 hens & sows. (10)
Ohio	Farm Coalition	2009 Issue 2 ³	Ohio Const. art XIV, § 1(A)	Livestock Care Standards Board
OK, SC, GA	Legislature	Prohibition on regulation of farm production by local gov'ts	Various	Limit Municipalities

¹ This law affected exactly 2 farms

² The Arizona law affected 1 (one) hog farm and no veal operations were in existence.

³ Prevents the introduction of State ballot initiatives to pass anti-cruelty measures in Ohio for farm animals.

<http://www.nationalaglawcenter.org/assets/farmanimal/index.html>

Consumers, who won't voluntarily pay more for specific production practices as an individual, will often vote with non-consumers to make everyone pay more as demonstrated in recent political campaigns in the United States (Tonsor et al., 2009). In addition, governments are often willing to constrain economic development in agriculture if supported by citizen concerns (Auger et al., 2003; Bill 17 Manitoba, 2008).

HISTORIC EXAMPLES OF POLICY ARRANGEMENTS

The default agricultural policy arrangement in most countries in the western world from the turn of the century to the mid 1980's was corporatism; agriculture industry coalitions largely directed farm policy [this continues in the USA]. Countries that have corporatist systems typically utilize strong state intervention to direct corporatist policies and to prevent conflict between the groups. Examples of Corporatist intervention are subsidies in USA agriculture policy and Supply Management, with import control policies in Canada (Figure 2). Corporatist organization is possible only within the Nation State and only when the major players in the Policy Coalition are in general agreement with the goals of the target policy.

Figure 2. General description of the major types of government interaction in public policy arrangements.

The rescue of stray and unwanted pets in North America is largely a Liberal system where non-profit organizations generate infrastructure and operate self funded shelter systems. Supply management in agriculture reflects a strong corporatist structure. The Canadian gun registry is viewed by its many opponents as primarily Statist.



The Iron Triangle - The Netherlands

In the years following WWII, food production was the sole purpose of agriculture and therefore the unified goal of the policy coalition that developed around the agriculture issues. In The Netherlands, the post war agricultural community was isolated from the urban community and civil society as a whole. Three core players emerged to direct the modernization of Dutch agriculture in the recovery from the war. The State was represented by the Ministry of Agriculture, farmers by the *Landbouwschap*, (or farmers unions) and the Parliamentary Committee on Agriculture represented the interests of society. With these three groups in total agreement, the objective to develop a modern competitive export oriented agriculture sector was rarely questioned. This iron triangle was actually a continuation of a similar policy arrangement represented by the Agricultural Crisis Act of 1933/34, which had protected farmers from low prices subsequent to a period of overproduction between the wars.

Subsequent to significant rise in public concerns over environmental externalities, massive livestock disease emergencies, and pressures of joining the European Community, the remnants of the old Ministry of Agriculture are now a subordinate function of the new super-ministry formed when the Department of Nature Conservation and Outdoor Recreation was merged with the department of Agriculture and Fisheries in 1982. There has been a dramatic shift from a client ministry solely oriented towards agricultural interest to a ministry of “general” administration. Strong public opinion and strong political pressure advocated for the integration of agriculture, nature, and possibly increased integration of the recreational and residential value of previously rural spaces (Wisserhof, 2000). Livestock farming has moved from a right to farm context to a condition where society gives its permission for some individuals to farm.

Farmers in Western Europe are increasingly being viewed as producers of, in addition to agricultural products, public goods based on countryside values, amenity and access values, landscape preservation and maintenance, and objects like biodiversity, all of which they have a right to be compensated for (Rossmiller, 1998). The taxpayer probably does not have a similar attitude to rural spaces in agricultural areas in most of Canada. Incidentally, governments paying farmers for these “additional agricultural products” based on social values are “green box” in that they are not coupled with production and do not distort international trade.

Agricultural Revolution in New Zealand 1985

In the period 1950-1970, New Zealand implemented a massive program to establish young farmers on agricultural land and provide the tools for further agri-development and growth focused primarily at the export market. By the 1970's, the hallmarks of corporatist agriculture were well entrenched, heavy direct subsidization, minimum price guarantees, subsidized banking and capital costs, single desk marketing and all possible market signals for producers to curb production were removed.

By 1984, with only 20% of farm production consumed domestically, 30% of all agriculture output was government direct payments to farmers, with assistance payments to lamb produced accounting for 76% of farm gate price. In addition, agriculture accounted for 50% of

merchandise exported meaning that consumers in other countries were benefiting from the farm subsidy.

In the mid-80's, the New Zealand economy was in a precarious state. Starting in 1985, all market distorting support for agriculture was removed, special banking services were discontinued and the government agriculture extension programs were eliminated or privatized. Land prices dropped precipitously, previously managed marginal land was abandoned, and agriculture profitability was meagre, especially in meat production. Significant economic and fiscal reform was also implemented in other sectors. Since 1984, there has been a contraction in sheep and beef production with a conversion to dairy and horticulture production. Agriculture was one of several economic imbalances addressed in New Zealand starting in 1985, but changes in agriculture were out on the bleeding edge and more aggressive than changes in other sectors, such as input price controls, employment liberalization and the financial sector (Harris and Rae, 2004).

To complete and confirm the new policy arrangement (nail in the coffin), in 1996 Proportional Representation was implemented in the House of Commons which greatly and permanently diluted the power of the rural vote in New Zealand (Johnson, 1996).

The New Zealand experiment is an example of a very strong Corporatist arrangement being radically replaced by a Statist organization with strong citizen level political support.

Part XII, Health of Animals Act, Canada 2009

Corporatism can occasionally be a very ineffective organizational model, as any individual group can block progress of the policy discussion by willful obstruction. In Canada, the Canadian Food Inspection Agency has been in corporatist negotiations with the livestock industries for more than 15 years to update the Humane Transport of Animals section (Part XII) of the Health of Animals Regulation. Major unresolved issues relate to time in transit rules, with Canada allowing livestock to be transported for time periods roughly twice the USA 28 hour rule and four times as long as comparable regulations in the EU.

There has been little, to no, discernable progress in this, essentially a social contract issue. Animal welfare is perceived as a general policy domain, not a policy limited to the agricultural community, therefore animal welfare assurance is a concern of society as a whole whether you eat pork or not. Recently Alexandra Mendès, Member of Parliament for Brossard – La Prairie, PQ introduced a private members bill [Bill C-468 (CAN)] October 28, 2009 to limit livestock transport times and to effect by legislative means what the CFIA could not successfully negotiate by co-operative means. This was a dramatic shift from a Corporatist policy negotiation to a Statist model in response to perceived failure of the previous negotiation to responsibly proceed. Parliament was prorogued before debate on this Bill and we have yet to see any evidence the livestock policy coalition understands what this initiative in parliament actually means. There is a real possibility that the discourse on transport of livestock will be removed from the current livestock policy coalition (realm of agriculture) and given in trust to a non-agriculture policy coalition (realm of society).

Updating Animal Cruelty Canada Criminal Code 2007

An appreciation of the dynamics of a changing policy arrangement and resulting political dance can be obtained by review of the attempts to update the Criminal Code animal cruelty provisions which started in earnest in 1998. After multiple variations of proposed amendments to the Criminal Code being introduced into the House of Commons, the discourse on this issue has been effectively halted or at least stalled by the passage of Senate Bill, S-213 on Dec 7, 2007 (AFAC, 2010). Where public opinion on an issue is highly divided, or the issue is highly divisive (the abortion debate), policy arrangements are difficult to form and status quos can be very stable. Long standing entrenched organizations such The Canadian Wheat Board can be expected to be a resilient policy arrangement, and reluctant to change.

Canadian Government Unilateral Actions

The Canadian Agri-Food Research Council (CARC) (1974-2006) was the most important national advisory body influencing agri-food research and policy. Now disbanded, it was funded by the Research Branch of AAFC, and had a small full-time staff in Ottawa. Its membership included representatives from AAFC and each provincial government (only one for Atlantic Canada), a representative from universities with colleges of agricultural and/or veterinary medicine, representatives of a number of national organizations (such as the Canada Grains Council, the Canadian Federation of Agriculture, the Canadian Forage Council, the Canadian Pork Council, the Agricultural Institute of Canada and the Canadian Horticultural Council), and chairs of four national “Canada committees.” The latter were the Canada Committees on Crops, Animals, Natural Resources, and Food; each of these committees met at least once a year to formulate recommendations to go to CARC.

The four “Canada committees” were the apex of a series of national or regional committees, generally referred to as “expert committees.” For example, the Canada Committee on Animals formed a sub-committee, the “expert committee on animal welfare” which met annually to identify research needs in both science and policy. Each expert committee involved representation from various provinces; the meat processing industries, the national livestock associations, veterinary and animal science universities and the Canadian Federation of Humane Societies; the producer representation was generally minimal on most of these committees.

CARC maintained an inventory of agri-food research in Canada, and assisted various sectors in developing national research and development strategies. For example, research strategies were developed for dairy and pork. The CARC web site, www.carc-crac.ca is now defunct; a search of the AAFC website returns no reference or history to suggest CARC ever existed and there is no successor group at the federal level to replace the functions of CARC. One could suggest that the federal government simply went out of the animal welfare consulting business, or effectively removed animal welfare from the federal agriculture ministers’ agenda.

CARC was a classic instrument of corporatist policy negotiations. It facilitated connection and communication between social and institutional power blocks involved in agriculture policy. Its dissolution represented a decisive policy decision that moved the process of policy making to a statist or liberal approach. An approach with less communication with society at large can be

viewed as more Statist, even though in Agriculture policy is largely about subsidies, and what industries and programs qualify for public support.

The Agriculture Policy Framework

On June 2001, the federal, provincial and territorial Ministers of Agriculture took an additional dramatic new approach to the participation of society in agriculture. New agriculture policy development would be a shared and integrated process based on 5 year plans. Costs for agriculture policy would continue to be jointly shared by the federal and provincial governments. The first 5-year plan was called the Agriculture Policy Framework (APF). It was primarily a business plan to try and keep farmers profitable. Topics made it onto the agenda if they could affect farm profitability, such as the areas of science and food safety. Environmental stewardship, which essentially is a social policy concern and the sole purvey of the Provinces under the Canadian Constitution, was also included in the scope of the APF. This, in part, may be explained as most provinces in Canada had implemented new environmental protection legislation related to manure management between 1995 and 2000, making consideration of the environment a cost of production.

Farm animal welfare is becoming a growing issue in State level politics in the USA with several policy coalitions successfully challenging the Corporatist arrangements, for example Proposition-2 in California. Concern for farm animal welfare may be a social issue similar to environmental protection, but, was clearly excluded from the APF agenda and therefore no program related to farm animal welfare was eligible for funding under APF. The other dramatic change in overriding policy arrangement was the decision for the federal government, through AAFC, to no longer fund new programs, only the start up process of such programs. This reflects a markedly liberal conviction with a movement towards non-involvement of the government/society in the business and economy of agriculture.

The new 5-year plan started in 2008 and is called the “Growing Forward” policy framework with \$1.3 billion in federal funding. Farm biosecurity and livestock traceability were added to the agenda of approved initiatives but, animal welfare is not in scope, with the exception of a side agreement signed with Alberta. If farm animal welfare is a true citizen concern, it is not a concern of the current FPT (Federal-Provincial-Territorial) policy arrangement. Provincial farm animal welfare initiatives can not be funded jointly with the federal government as other agriculture issues are, but, are the sole initiative of the province.

New Policy Coalitions and Organizations

There are three emerging organizations on the Canadian landscape that give some hope for a future where new social issues, such as farm animal welfare, can be reasonably reflected in public policy, using the current agricultural policy coalitions. The first is the National Farm Animal Care Council [<http://www.nfacc.ca/>].

Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada's Advancing Canadian Agriculture and Agri-Food (ACAAF) Program provided initial funding to establish a national Council on farm animal care. This is a non-government organization with a mandate to provide a national coordinated approach, to

promote responsible farm animal care. The Council is composed of and funded primarily by the livestock industry. This organization will replace the function of developing farm codes of practice previously delivered by CARC. The NFACC must become self funded by the agricultural business interests in the near future as there is no method of funding this organization under the current FTP policy arrangement.

Secondly, the provinces departments of agriculture have all reorganized to appoint a Chief Veterinary Officer and there is a consultative council of CVO's in Canada. It is clear that, in the near future, improvements to farm animal health and legislation and programs related to improved animal health will be increasingly a shared jurisdiction with the provinces. This is consistent with Section 95 of the Canadian Constitution which makes agriculture and immigration the only 2 policy fields where the nation and the provinces share responsibility. One of the early projects of the CCVO group was to participate in the development of a national Farm Animal Health and Welfare Strategy (Anon., 2009). Shared delivery of animal health policy will require significant re-arrangement of the national policy coalition as previous disease control programs have been largely national and not a shared jurisdiction.

Counter to all regular Agriculture policy of the Federal Government; on Friday Nov 6th 2009, The House resumed consideration of the motion of Mrs. Simson (Scarborough Southwest), seconded by Mrs. Jennings (Notre-Dame-de-Grâce—Lachine), That, in the opinion of the House, the government should support the development and adoption of a Universal Declaration on Animal Welfare at the United Nations [<http://www.udaw.org/>] as well as at all relevant international organizations and forums; (Private Members' Business M-354). The question was put on the motion, as amended, and it was agreed to (GOC-HOC, 2009). This suggests that some animals, or at least the idea of animal welfare, is part of the greater national consciousness, just temporarily not reflected in national agriculture policy.

CONCLUSIONS

Agriculture policy is very much like a sport and when playing the sport, it is very important not to lose control of the ball. Corporatism, the old rule of the game is, if not dead, suffering from a serious injury. Producers must aggressively support their views and their place in the policy coalition or lose a voice in agriculture policy.

Although counter incidents can be identified, the overall power shift in the way policy is decided in Canada and other western democracies can be characterized as a withdrawal-of-government and are manifested in two distinct ways. There is a strong shift from the producer making decisions on his/her farm to the retailer describing the method of production. Also, there is a rise in the relative political influence of near direct citizen policy coalitions. In the trade arena, there is a strong shift of power from the Nation State to multi-national corporations (Thompson et al., 2007). Some have argued that the use of the term multi-national is misleading, and that the adjective “un-national” better reflects a business practice model characterized by disregard, distrust and demeaning of any attitude that would try to balance the self-determination of nations or social convictions of peoples with the profit and efficiency of trading groups.

Animal farming is no longer viewed simply as a means of food production. Instead it is considered as relevant to other key social goals, such as food safety and quality, environmental protection, sustainability and warranty of a suitable humane treatment of animals. Therefore, governments, retailers and producers are increasingly recognizing the multi-functional nature of humans' perception of food as fundamental aspects of product image and quality, which create a need for reliable systems aimed at farm monitoring of methods of production and providing guarantees on appropriate production conditions and traceability. In other words, the way a product is produced is an attribute of an overall 'food quality concept'.

The major holistic proactive tools recognized for adopting standardized methods of production at farm level is the implementation of on-farm measures based on the principles of HACCP (Hazard Analysis Critical Control Points) and on the principles of quality management (QM-Systems) and certification programs (Quality Assurance) such as ISO 9000:2000. The need to improve the method of production of food of animal origin in response to the consumers' and the society's expectations has been realized and addressed for at least 10 years. These changes are most evident in countries with a developed pork production, especially in countries that export pork (Denmark, The Netherlands, Belgium, the USA and Canada). These countries have, in slightly different ways, developed standards for swine production that are driven by the producer associations (the Canadian Pork Quality Assurance System, and the PQA System of the U.S. National Pork Producer Council), or by industry associations (the Danish Quality Management System for pork, the Quality Assurance System of the UK Meat and Livestock Council, the Dutch Produktschapt voor Vee and Vlees with its renowned IKB-program (Integrale Keten Beheersing), and the German QM-System for food from feed to retail (QS-System) (Blaha, 2005).

The major re-active tools to deal with social concerns in agriculture have been legislative at the national or sub-national level, including the increasing oversight of manure management and environmental protection, the graduated "Phasing-out" of the most egregious animal welfare components of management systems. In late January 2007, the world's largest producer and pork processor, Smithfields (Smithfield Foods, Inc. SFD), announced voluntary plans to replace gestation stalls at its 187 company-owned sow farms. In January 2008, Maple Leaf Foods Inc., reported that they also will also phase out the use of sow gestation stalls in favour of group housing at all its hog production operations within the next 10 years.

Producer groups should be vigilant in investing in policy coalitions that participate in the ever-changing discourse related to the production of human food of animal origin.

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