

Globe and Mail
MANITOBA
National News

Charges sought in hog abuse case; Investigator shaken by grisly scene of 2,400 dead and starving pigs
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3 July 2010

WINNIPEG -- Twyla Francois can't scrub the scene or the stench from her mind.

Even after 100 previous investigations of hog-barn abuses, this one still leaves her shaking.

The grisly scene involving 2,400 pigs – 400 dead and 2,000 starving – was discovered on a Manitoba farm on June 18. It is now believed to be the largest case of animal cruelty ever in Canada.

This week Ms. Francois, the head investigator for Canadians for the Ethical Treatment of Food Animals, posted video footage from inside the now-destroyed barn on YouTube in hopes of pressuring investigators to lay charges. “Based on past cases, I'd say chances are good that either charges will be dropped or they'll hand out a very minimal charge,” said Ms. Francois of past cruelty cases in Manitoba. “This one is too shady to let that happen.”

It's a rare point of agreement for Ms. Francois and Manitoba's pork producers.

“We are encouraging the province to pursue this matter forcefully and lay the appropriate charges,” said Andrew Dickson, general manager of the Manitoba Pork Council. “The producers I've talked to are shocked and embarrassed by this. If the province doesn't press charges, we will have to sit down and do something ... like ensure the person responsible for this doesn't look after pigs ever again.”

Neighbours of the barn noticed a foul smell and the incessant screams of pigs for over a week before the abuse came to light. The neglect was exposed when members of a Hutterite colony who owned the pigs reported to local RCMP that the barn's owner had denied them entry. When police and colony-members forced their way into the barn, roughly 100 kilometres southwest of Winnipeg, they discovered roughly 400 dead and decaying pigs. The remaining 2,000 were emaciated. About 160 had to be euthanized.

Five days later, the barn burned to the ground during an early-morning fire. The provincial fire commissioner is still investigating and has deemed the blaze suspicious.

Investigators for the Office of the Chief Veterinarian has found that food and water hoppers were full, but being withheld from the animals. The ventilation system had been shut off.

The barn had been cleared out by the time Ms. Francois arrived with her camera, but the scene

remained gruesome. "I had to edit the footage quite heavily because I was so disturbed," she says. "In the raw footage, you can seem me slipping in remains. There were pools of blood left outside the barn."

The barn's owner, Martin Grenier, answered a call from The Globe and Mail but refused to make any comment while the investigation is continuing.

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