



## Hog farmers on their last legs

Hundreds of pork producers plead for aid in protest at Province House  
By STEVE BRUCE Staff Reporter

An Annapolis Valley farmer who says he can't afford to feed his 1,700 hogs much longer loaded five piggies onto a truck Tuesday morning and drove to Halifax for a rally.

"I'm prepared to leave them, if anybody wants to feed these things," Terry Beck, who has operated a hog farm in North Kingston since 1979, told reporters outside Province House.

"I need immediate relief from the government or I'm out of business in two or three months."

Hundreds of Nova Scotia farmers and their families and supporters packed the street near the legislature to draw attention to the troubled state of farming in general and the pork industry in particular.

Pork Nova Scotia estimates 60 per cent of the province's hog farmers will be forced into bankruptcy over the next few months unless the government comes up with \$6 million in bridge financing for producers.

Agriculture Minister Brooke Taylor says the province has already contributed \$11 million to the pork industry since 2003 and hog farmers will benefit further from a \$9.7-million farm assistance program announced in December that takes effect in April.

But pork producers can't wait until April, Patrick Ueffing told Tuesday's rally.

"We need short-term financial help immediately . . . and we need a long-term plan put in place so we can get our fair share of the market price," said Mr. Ueffing, a hog and turkey farmer from Sheffield Mills, Kings County.

Mr. Ueffing said it costs farmers about \$1.70 per kilogram to raise a pig for market but they only receive \$1.25 per kilogram from processors.

"When you go to the grocery store to buy pork chops, they usually charge \$7 to \$8 a kilogram.

"In a matter of a few days, (the value of) that same pig somehow miraculously increases substantially at the store level. Somebody is making money and it's definitely not us."

Mr. Ueffing said the pork industry in Nova Scotia employs 1,500 people directly or indirectly and generates \$100 million a year in economic spinoffs.

"This not a huge request," he said of the hog farmers' plea for assistance. "This can be done if there is a political will to do so. Rural Nova Scotia is agriculture and it scares me to think what will happen to our fields and farms if government doesn't attempt to help us."

Nathan Greeno, a 19-year-old student at the Nova Scotia Agricultural College in Bible Hill, said there is no future in the province for young people like him unless the government increases its support for farmers.

"How can a student go home to a farm that's so far in debt that we can never bring it out of the ground?" said Mr. Greeno, of Lorneville, Cumberland County. "We do not want to start farming in the hole.

"I am a fifth-generation farmer and if I can't farm, I don't even want to live. This is my life. I want this to be my life. I want this to be my children's life and my grandchildren's life.

"Rodney MacDonald, if you want to keep us students in Nova Scotia, put your money where your mouth is and put it in agriculture," Mr. Greeno urged the premier. "Support agriculture and it will support you. If not, we're moving west."

The agriculture minister addressed the crowd briefly, reiterating his comments from the day before that the province only has so much money available.

"Your presence here today will help me in my deliberations and discussions with caucus and cabinet," Mr. Taylor said. "The message is strong and clear — farmers feed us all."

Mr. Taylor said he grew up on a dairy farm in the Musquodoboit Valley and remembers how hard life was at times.

"The fiscal reality is we have to be accountable to the taxpayers of this province. We've been fair. We will continue working with the farming community, but we have to appreciate that we cannot by law run a deficit in this province."

Rick Clarke, president of the Nova Scotia Federation of Labour, said the province cannot afford to lose a potential \$60 million from the economy should pork farmers start going under.

"Our government is spending money . . . putting billboards up in Alberta trying to convince Nova Scotians to come back home and work in Nova Scotia, but at the same time their actions and inactions are undermining a very vital industry in this province," Mr. Clarke said.

"I say shame on government and do your work at home."

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