

**COMMUNITY:** York Region does not have a uniform bylaw enforcing humane treatment of market animals

# Cruelty or commerce?

People speak out in protection of live animals up for sale at farmers markets

BY JOAN RANSBERRY  
Staff Writer

**T**he treatment of animals at the Stouffville Country Market has caught the attention of the provincial and municipal authorities and prompted a call for a humane care bylaw.

In the past two weeks, the Ontario Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals has received five complaints linked to the well being of the live animals for sale at the Stouffville Country Market.

Complaints include a duck with a missing beak, a rabbit with an eye injury, animals being slaughtered on the premises, lack of shade and no water for some animals, birds jammed into cages, birds being hung up in the air by one wing, live animals being stuffed in bags and then shoved into the trunk of a car and a dog so thin it could barely walk.

Warnings have been issued to vendors and the latest complaints are being investigated, said OSPCA inspector Mike Draper.

"I have removed a number of animals from Stouffville's market. I've received calls about puppies being sold and I'm investigating an allegation that slaughtering is taking place right on the property," Draper said.

## OFFICIALS NOT AWARE OF ABUSE

However, Stouffville Country Market officials said they were not made aware of any problems with the animals, business manager Gary Rouse told *The Economist & Sun/Stouffville Tribune*.

"We just didn't know," Rouse said. "I wasn't aware. I'm not a farmer so I don't know what's OK and what isn't."

Officials of the market have agreed to partner themselves with the OSPCA, the town's animal control office and the vendors to come up with a plan to set some rules linked to the selling of animals. The meeting is planned for early fall.

"We're more than willing to resolve this," Rouse said.

"We're going to get something in writing to give to the vendors. If they violate, they're going to be told they can't rent here."

"Most vendors are responsible and caring towards the animals," but not all, Draper said.

It is difficult to manage this. Some vendors are just in it for a quick buck.

Bill Fletcher, a third generation farmer, has been a vendor at the Stouffville market for more than 30 years.

Common sense and a humane approach to life guides Fletcher.

"I wasn't at the market last Sunday. It was too hot. If it's too hot for me, it's too hot for my chickens."

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STAFF FILE PHOTO/SJOERD WITTEVEN

A pair of live rabbits is stuffed in a bag at Stouffville Country Market.

He arrives at the market at 4:30 a.m. "I'll have 90 per cent of my selling done before 6 a.m.," he said.

While a meeting to set standards will include the OSPCA, Rouse, Stouffville's animal control officials and Stouffville

Councillor Sue Sherban, Stouffville resident Gerri Robertson is pushing for a municipal law, designed to protect the animals, after a recent visit to the Hwy. 47 market.

"The systematic abuse, neglect and cru-

elty to these unfortunate animals should not be fostered by the municipality of Whitchurch-Stouffville. It should not be allowed anywhere," Robertson stated in a letter to local council.

Her concerns include no shade or water for ponies, birds and rabbits crowded in cages under the glare of the sun and a struggling and screaming turkey being stuffed into a mesh bag.

"I watched one vendor oversee a purchaser lift a heavy goose by one wing. I told the vendors they should not allow the birds to be treated in this way and, of course, they laughed at me," Robertson said.

"None of the animals I saw had water," she added. "The poor rabbits were also stuffed in cages with the sun beating down on them."

There's a right and a wrong way to do most things including handling animals, Fletcher pointed out.

"Rabbits are not to be picked up by the ears. A rabbit should be lifted by the skin at the back of the neck."

Sherban also inspected the market last weekend. "I observed what's going on. My problem is I don't know the standards so I don't know if they're being violated."

## PROVINCIAL LAWS SOUGHT

The market industry needs to be regulated province-wide, Draper said.

Fletcher has no objection to the market being regulated.

"As long as it's based on common sense," he said.

OSPCA inspectors visit the Stouffville Country Market about twice a month.

"We're usually there for about a half hour on each visit," Draper said.

The OSPCA gives advice in the proper care of animals, retiring OSPCA chief inspector Terry Looker explained.

"Inspectors will also try to respond to complaints of deliberate cruelty," he said.

OSPCA inspectors cannot perform the role of a formal monitoring authority and the society would prefer to see animal and poultry sales taking place in facilities which are property controlled and licensed for the sale of livestock, Looker said.

With no provincial laws in place for farmer markets, many municipalities in Ontario are opting for a humane bylaw to cover such problems as a lack of water, a lack of proper shelter and sick animals.

"This bylaw is becoming more common," Draper said.

The new City of Toronto just passed it. But in York Region, the only ones with it are Vaughan and Richmond Hill. "I'd like to see it throughout York."

Sherban is reviewing Richmond Hill's bylaw. "I need to study it. If this comes to council, it won't be until the fall."

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