

Best Practices for Keeping Your Livestock Contained

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INTRODUCTION

Part of the long-standing responsibility of caring for domesticated animals, including farm animals, is keeping them under the supervision of the owner or caretaker. There are a number of acts and associated regulations in Ontario as well as municipal bylaws that specify a livestock owner's obligations to keep their animals under their care, and to get them back under control when out of containment. It's not acceptable to allow livestock to roam unchecked in Ontario. This factsheet will outline some of the obligations of animal owners or caretakers and suggested best practices to keep or return animals to containment.

BEST PRACTICES — BE A GOOD NEIGHBOUR

It is important to respect the property, health and safety of other citizens, including their animals and the environment in the rural community. Any owner of farm animals must ensure that their animals are good neighbours too by keeping them on their own property.

Steps to take:

- **Introduce yourself.** Get to know your neighbours so you are comfortable talking to them in the event your animals escape, and for other neighbourly supports. Obtain your neighbours' contact information, including cellphone numbers.

- **Use proper fencing for the species.** Many options are widely offered by Ontario agribusinesses. Information on fencing is available on the Ontario Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs (OMAFRA) website at ontario.ca/livestock such as:
 - [Fencing Options for Predator Control](#)
 - [Fencing for Outdoor Pig Production](#)
- **Check animals frequently.** Long-distance ownership of animals without local caretakers is not a best practice. Through frequent management and observation of the animals, health and hygiene problems can be avoided and escapes can be promptly detected.
- **Ensure proper maintenance of animal equipment.** Checking fence-lines and housing facilities regularly will reduce the risk of enclosure failure, keeping your livestock secure at all times. Check livestock handling facilities and loading chutes for gaps where animals could escape.
- **Use animal identification.** In addition to the formal identification (ID) requirements that are addressed below, herd or flock management markings on ear tags or on the animals themselves can help describe animals that escape.

LEGISLATIVE OVERVIEW

Depending on the situation and location within the province, there are a series of historical regulations and municipal bylaws that address the issue of livestock and pet animals out of containment.

Municipal Bylaws. Many municipalities in Ontario have animal control bylaws that are enforced by municipal staff or a contractor, frequently on a complaint basis. The issue of livestock and pet containment, regardless of species, may fall under this jurisdiction and animals at large problems can be addressed by the municipal animal control service.

Pounds Act. Originally enacted in 1897 and most recently amended in 2006, this Act gives authority on escaped domestic animals to any municipality that has established bylaws. The *Pounds Act* also applies to cattle, horses, sheep, goats or swine, stating that "animals [are] not to run at large." It makes owners liable for damages caused by their animals and describes seizure and sale of impounded animals.

Provincial Animal Welfare Services Act (PAWS). The PAWS Act is primarily focused on issues around animal welfare, it gives appointees significant powers. An animal at large could be deemed in distress on account of poor access to feed or housing or endangerment and, thus, its owner subject to complaint.

Health of Animals Act. The *Health of Animals Act* is federal legislation. There are regulatory requirements for all cattle, sheep, pigs and bison to have animal identification before they leave the farm of origin. Movements need to be recorded for the purposes of animal disease control. Other livestock sectors are undertaking frameworks to achieve traceability systems in the future. This means animals typically must be tagged or have group identification that is recognized by the "Trace" systems before leaving the farm. The regulation does not distinguish between escaped animals and animals being transported deliberately. This Act has significant powers of enforcement, including cooperative education, fines and prosecution.

DEALING WITH AND RECAPTURING ESCAPED ANIMALS

Animal owners must appreciate that in the event that their livestock escape, their fellow citizens may take action. The following are possible actions citizens may take (in order of priority):

1. **Document** each decision and contact in this process.
2. **Reporting to police/call 911 in the event of imminent danger to people or to the escaped animal(s)**, for example, aggressive animals or livestock on a roadway. If not an immediate danger, then,
3. **Reporting to the owner.** If the owner is unknown or will not respond, then,
4. **Reporting to municipal animal control.** If the animal is not subject to municipal control, then,
5. **Reporting to OMAFRA at 1-877-424-1300 or relevant commodity organization** with particulars of the animal's risk profile (health, location, damage). They can then refer the issue to the appropriate individuals.
6. **Humane Removal.** If the previous steps do not solve the problem, citizens have the right to protect their property from escaped livestock. They could remove the animal humanely by safe capture or euthanasia.

Wild Pigs

Sightings of an escaped or a wild pig should be reported to the Ministry of Natural Resources and Forestry (MNRF) at wildpigs@ontario.ca. MNRF is collecting and monitoring sightings from the public to learn more about the number and location of wild pigs in the province. For more information on wild pigs in Ontario, visit ontario.ca/wildpigs.

RECAPTURING ESCAPED LIVESTOCK

In most cases, livestock that escape the property — whether onto a roadway or neighbouring property — are quickly contained by responsible owners. This is the best outcome in terms of speed and resources needed. Recapture is usually best achieved using animal behaviour, including strong motivators for the animals such as feed and the desire to be with the herd. In most cases, allowing the animal to be lured with these motivators and a safety net of surrounding boundaries is more effective than chasing the animal towards the

desired location. In some cases, animals will have to be captured in a secure corral or pen in their own time using feed, water and herd mate cues. Remember, domesticated animals are in fact social animals, and hunger and the need for togetherness are powerful motivators! Using these motivators to your advantage in recapture rather than fear-based motivators such as driving the animals, is typically more humane, controlled and effective.

CONCLUSION

All Ontarians have the benefit of various regulations and societal expectations to be protected from other citizens' livestock. While the application of these laws may vary based on location, it is clear that owners of livestock are expected to properly contain their livestock to prevent injury to people and other livestock and damage to property. By making sure animals are well cared for and properly housed and fenced, livestock owners can do their part to be good stewards, benefitting their community and the farm economy.

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