

Dealing with Escaped Livestock in Your Community

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INTRODUCTION

Part of the long-standing responsibility of caring for farm animals is keeping them “at home.” Farmers and animal owners are obligated to keep their livestock under their care and to get them back under control when they escape containment. Under no circumstances is it acceptable to allow farm animals to roam unchecked in Ontario. Despite efforts from the livestock owner or caretaker, sometimes animals do escape. This factsheet is a resource for rural residents with tips on what you can expect from your rural neighbours who have animals and processes to return animals to containment if you see that they have escaped.

BEING GOOD NEIGHBOURS

As a neighbour, it is reasonable for you to expect that animal owners in your area provide the following:

- **Introductions.** Owners of animals should contact you directly in the event of escaped animals or for other neighbourly supports and issues. They may ask for your contact information, such as cellphone numbers, so that they can contact you if an animal escapes. You should also get their contact information so you can report when their animals have escaped.

- **Proper fencing for their animals.** There are many different livestock fencing options available to livestock owners. They should use the appropriate type of fencing for their animals. They should check the fencing regularly to ensure it is in good repair. If you have a concern about the condition of a fence that adjoins your property, call the owner to discuss.
- **Frequent observation of animals.** Absentee ownership of animals without appointed caretakers is not a best practice.
- **Proper maintenance of animal equipment.** Livestock owners must ensure that housing, fencing and handling facilities remain in good working condition to prevent escape.

LEGAL OBLIGATIONS

Ontario livestock owners have obligations under several federal, provincial and municipal laws to keep their animals on their property. These are more fully explained in the OMAFRA factsheet *Best Practices for Keeping Your Livestock Contained*, which is available on the Ontario Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs (OMAFRA) website at ontario.ca/livestock.

REPORTING AND REMOVING PROBLEM ANIMALS AT LARGE

The control and recapture/removal of escaped animals is a challenge, and issues can vary depending on the species, location and risk, but in general the following steps should be taken:

1. **Document** each decision and contact in this process.
2. **Report to police/call 911, in the event of imminent danger to people, or an animal in distress.** Examples include aggressive animals or livestock on a roadway. If not an immediate danger, then,
3. **Report the escape to the owner.** If the owner is unknown or will not respond, then,
4. **Report the escape to municipal animal control.** If the animal is not subject to municipal control, then,
5. **Report to OMAFRA at 1-877-424-1300 or to the relevant commodity organization** which can then refer the issue to appropriate individuals. Include particulars of the animal's apparent health, location and damage caused, if applicable. If the animal could pose a risk to human safety, animal welfare or property damage, then consider:
6. **Humane removal** by means of safe capture or euthanasia. This must only be done by individuals with suitable experience and capability.

Wild Pigs

Report sightings of an escaped or wild pig 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.

WARNING: RECAPTURING ESCAPED LIVESTOCK

Most livestock that leave their home 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 left to experienced individuals that understand animal motivators and the appropriate precautions and safety considerations. 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. Using these motivators in recapture rather than fear-based motivators, such as driving the animals, is typically more humane, controlled and effective.

Neighbouring residents should generally refrain from attempting to recapture stray livestock, and let their owner or authorities do it.

CONCLUSION

While unforeseen events periodically do happen, good livestock caretakers will quickly return stray animals to their proper housing. The risk of such events is also reduced by conscientious caretakers who properly maintain animal housing and equipment. When animals do escape, follow the steps outlined above, making a special note of the powers your municipality likely has in this area. If more direct intervention is required, ensure you have exhausted other avenues and document your attempts to deal with problem livestock. If the situation permits, always look to involve the animal owner who has the obligation, skills and equipment to recapture their animal(s) safely.

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