

Canadian Chicken Producer Convicted of Animal Cruelty

Colin Perkel, The Canadian Press

TORONTO (The Canadian Press) — One of the country's biggest chicken producers will have to spend at least \$1 million over three years to ensure compliance with federal rules after an Ontario judge convicted it of causing undue suffering to the birds.

In a case closely watched by animal-rights groups, Ontario Superior Court Justice Nancy Kastner also fined [Maple Lodge Farms](#) [1] \$80,000 on two of 20 counts of failing to transport chickens humanely.

Kastner placed the company based in Brampton, Ont., on three years probation, suspending the other 18 counts for the duration.

Among conditions of probation, the company will have to make public the convictions, sentence and measures it is taking to avoid further offences by "prominent" website posting.

The Canadian Food Inspection Agency charged Maple Lodge Farms under the Health of Animals Act with cruelty to chickens after 2,000 of the birds died on two trips to slaughter in the winter of 2008-2009.

One of the trucks was carrying spent hens — birds that have outlived their egg-laying usefulness; the other had broiler chickens — those raised for meat.

Evidence was that the birds succumbed after exposure to snow, frigid winds, and freezing temperatures during loading, transport, and unloading.

Kastner convicted the company in September 2013 on two of the counts, and Maple Lodge Farms pleaded guilty to 18 of the remaining charges this week in court in Brampton.

In her decision, Kastner said "lack of adequate training, personnel, or equipment" contributed to the high mortality rate of the transported birds.

The federal food inspection agency has described the company as an "animal-transport repeat violator."

"It wasn't humane transportation which governed the defendant's actions but a near religious dedication to supplying its production lines," the prosecution argued at trial.

Ensuring the company complies with the regulations formed a key part of Kastner's

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sentence.

Maple Lodge Farms must spend the \$1 million to modify its fleet of trailers used to carry broiler and spent hens and make other changes, Kastner ordered.

"MLF will establish policies, standards and procedures to reduce the likelihood of that organization committing a subsequent offence," the judge said in her sentencing decision.

Activists said the case demonstrates that "just-in-time" deliveries of chickens to market is a problem.

"Just-in-time production serves the industry, while animals suffer and die during extreme hot and cold weather," said Stephanie Brown, of Canadian Coalition for Farm Animals.

Kastner referred to economic factors when she convicted Maple Lodge.

"The evidence unfortunately supports the inference that economic factors tended to be placed above acts which were known, or ought to have been known, to reduce the effects of undue exposure to weather," the judge said.

Other probation conditions require the company to report publicly if more than one per cent of the broilers or more than four per cent of the spent hens are dead on arrival.

Drivers will have to report weather conditions at time of loading to the company, and take and keep digital photographs of the loading.

Maple Lodge Farms, which kills about 500,000 birds per day, must also provide quarterly proof of compliance.

Liz White, of Animal Alliance of Canada, said improvements to chicken-transport trailers are badly needed.

"One critically needed change is mechanically ventilated, heated and cooled vehicles, to replace low tech systems with tarps and passive ventilation," White said.

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Links:

[1] <https://twitter.com/MapleLodgeFarms>