

Public Consultations on Sustainable Hog Farming in Québec

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On July 3, 2002, BAPE was mandated by the Minister of the Environment to hold public consultations on sustainable hog farming in Québec. The purpose of the consultations, one in a series of measures aimed at better protecting the agricultural environment, was to examine production models in Québec and to assess their strengths and weaknesses, while identifying their impact on rural and farming communities and on the processing sector. The intent was to establish a framework for sustainable hog farming and to propose at least one production model for promoting the harmonious co-existence of diverse uses in a manner mindful of the environment. BAPE's mandate began September 15, 2002, and the deadline for tabling the report with the minister was September 15, 2003.

Given the extent of the mandate and the scope of the issues, coupled with the tight timeframe, BAPE's full expertise was deployed. On September 5, the president of BAPE, accompanied by the minister, held a press conference to announce the composition of the commission entrusted with the consultations, namely, Louise Boucher, Chair, and André Beauchamp, Mario Dumais and Alfred Marquis, Commissioners. A team of one special adviser, two secretaries, three coordinators, two communications consultants, one legal adviser, and six analysts was formed to assist the Commission.

Such a far-reaching consultation presupposes resolving a great many problems in terms of logistics as well as in terms of environmental and communications expertise. Despite these challenges, on October 10, 2002, the Commission called a press conference to announce the details of the procedure that would enable the Commission to successfully carry out its mandate and give citizens the opportunity to become informed and express their concerns and opinions. The consultations would be conducted in three phases—a series of thematic hearings followed by two regional tours.

As for environmental expertise, the required tasks included a preliminary analysis of the issues at stake in order to determine the basic elements of the investigation and to establish procedure. With a view to a comprehensive analysis, additional required tasks included finding and archiving the literature pertaining to the file, identifying resource persons, stakeholders and industry players, finding complementary information, and visiting various pork production sites.

The Commission's decision to go into the communities and to pay special attention to regional realities called for extensive logistical know-how. Thirty-three representatives of 13 government departments, 23 representatives of 11 industries, and 24 representatives of 10 interest groups were summoned to preparatory meetings. The thematic hearings and the hearings of the first regional tour required the presence of 220 people from 40 government departments and agencies, as well as 85 regional county municipalities. Needless to say, all of this meant accommodations, transportation and hall rental arrangements.

On the communications front, various things were done to inform the public and to encourage active participation. In addition to the press conference and the teleconferences with regional media, an eight-page information brochure on the consultations was

produced in less than a month. Alongside these initiatives, a website was developed to transmit the information. A mailing list of potential interested parties was drawn up and subdivided into a general list of all national players, 14 regional lists, and a specialized media list, for a total of over 2150 entries. In addition, 21 reading rooms were opened across Québec to give citizens access to the documentation on file. The Commission innovated by using new technology in some of these reading rooms. Five reading rooms offered access to the website, and in one reading room, the documentation was on CD-ROM.

On October 22, 2002, the public portion of the consultations began with the thematic hearings, during which various guest speakers presented an overview of the situation and the issues. These thematic hearings took place from October 23 to November 13 in six Québec cities.

Study of the pork production scenario continued with a 16-city tour between November 25, 2002, and February 6, 2003. The aim was to identify the specific features of each region with respect to hog farming and its impact. From March 3 to April 17, 2003, the Commission made its second tour, conducting 62 hearings in 16 cities and listening to 304 briefs and oral testimonies.

Behind the scenes, the drafting of the Commission report involved a range of activities such as analyzing the transcripts of the hearings and the documents and briefs submitted, and finding any missing information. The complementary activities added to the calendar for this purpose included missions outside Québec (Canadian provinces, United States and Europe).

By the time the curtain closed on the public portion of the consultations, a total of 9126 people had attended, 6085 for the thematic component and the first tour of consultations, and 3041 for the second tour. By the time the deadline for briefs had expired, 382 papers had been received.

The report of the citizens that was submitted reflects the collective deliberations of the Commission, and citizens, producers, groups, municipalities and industry representatives who seized this exceptional opportunity to analyze all aspects of the situation in a spirit of openness, attentive listening and mutual respect.

The Report of the Commission comprises four documents. The main report, entitled *L'inscription de la production porcine dans le développement durable*, features the Commission's analysis. It presents a template for sustainable development and concrete courses of short-term, medium-term and long-term action in the social, economic and ecological arenas, and the 14 observations, 54 opinions and 58 recommendations arising from this analysis. Volume 1, entitled *L'état de la situation de la production porcine au Québec*, is an examination of the strengths and weaknesses of current production models and their impact on natural, rural, and agricultural communities and on the processing sector. Volume 2, *Les préoccupations et les propositions de la population au regard de la production porcine*, reports on public concerns and proposals. The final document, a series of Appendices, collates all the information pertaining to the Commission's fulfilment of its mandate. The Report of the Commission is available in print, on CD-

ROM, and on-line at the website of the Bureau d'audiences publiques sur l'environnement at www.bape.gouv.qc.ca.