



Surviving the Collapse of PKI Communications Lessons Summer 2008



Background: Who were the players?

- Pigeon King International and Benn Contracting Ltd. owned by Arlan Galbraith
- Involved up to 1,000 pigeon growers in Ontario, the Prairies, and up to 17 U.S. States
- Ontario: 14 Holding barns (approx. 200,000 birds)
- approx. 250 Breeder farms/owners (unknown number of birds, >400,000)



Background: About the business

- Pigeon breeding stock multiplication for future racer and/or squab markets
- Possible building of a federal processing plant for export
- Breed of bird made squab market options questionable
- Canadian Police Authorities are investigating whether a criminal act was perpetrated



Breeders

- Breeders were owners of the birds, had paid for possession and had a clear title to the animals
- Responsible for caring for their birds
- Many contracts: Cost of breeders ranged from free to \$500/pair
- Returns ranged from \$8-\$50 for a five-month youngling; average 10 chicks per pair/year



Holding Barns

- Holding barn owners were landlords, birds belonged to PKI
- Buildings ranged from poultry and dairy barns, converted drive sheds
- Ownership was in question
- Many parties might have claim, (breeders who had birds in barns and not yet paid and breeders that were awaiting their breeding pairs, Trustee in Bankruptcy)
- Holding barns were deemed the priority



Options for Owners

- OMAFRA developed a web resource of options (low cost feed, lighting, limited processing options, euthanasia & disposal info)
1. Continue to care for the birds
 2. Try to sell the birds
 3. Try to sell the birds for meat
 4. Euthanize the birds
 5. Let them go



Timelines

- Pigeon breeders, holding barns, OMAFRA advised of bankruptcy June 17th
- OFAC advised June 18th
- Media started June 20th
- OFAC hosted conference call June 20th
- OMAFRA conference call June 23rd
- \$100,000 emergency fund June 26th
- First barn gassed June 28th
- Last barn gassed July 22nd



Partners

- OMAFRA- Ontario Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs
- Ontario Farm Animal Council
- Ontario Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals
- Industry partners: **Egg Farmers of Ontario**, Brian's Poultry Services, WS Feeds, ex PKI employees, many more
- CFIA Equipment (limited)



To euthanize or not?

Opportunities

- Deal with problem quickly, limit financial losses
- Deal with potential animal welfare issues quickly

Challenges

- Emotional trauma of farmers
- Cost based on #'s (Breeder vs Holding Barn)
- Organization of event
- Worker Safety
- Humane euthanasia: What is allowed?
- Disposal of dead birds



How was it handled?

- 14 Holding barns
- Each barn was telephoned by OSPCA to first evaluate their situation
- Feed: offer of short term feed supplied if they planned to euthanize; moved feed farm to farm
- Barn visits by OMAFRA and OSPCA; assess farm, logistics, methods of euthanasia



How was it handled?

- Euthanize: offer to euthanize birds no charge, signed a waiver
 - Cervical dislocation
 - Portable gassing unit
 - Whole barn gassing
- OFAC, OSPCA, OMAFRA on site at each barn during euthanasia.
- End result: 13 of 14 barns decided to euthanize
- Disposal/deadstock: technical advice, at their expense





Portable Gas Unit

- Very effective
- Research unit of UofG/OMAFRA/CFIA
- Good option for barns that could not be sealed, smaller numbers
- 2000 pigeons/cycle; 15 minutes/cycle from start to finish
- Really tested it in the field – not ideal!



Disposal of the birds

- Technical advice & assistance
- Options:
- Rendering
- Composting
- Burial



General Overview of Costs

Feed	\$1,250
Whole Barn Gassing	\$41,000
Portable Chamber Gassing	\$15,000
Catching Crews	\$8,400
Project team expenses	\$22,000
Total	\$87,650



Why was OFAC involved?

OFAC's Public Relations Plan for agriculture:

1. Do the right thing.
2. Tell people about it.

Don't accept anything you wouldn't want to see on the six o'clock news or on YouTube



Communications Challenges

Pigeons!

- Low levels of understanding of the birds, the market, the business structure; What is squab?!

Who has answers? Who is doing what?

- First week was spent on the phone answering questions, asking questions, talking to key players, getting updated
- Conference call hosted first Friday by OFAC, continued regularly by OMAFRA for a full month



Communications Challenges

Who has answers?

- OMAFRA developed resource sheet, including lists of options and phone numbers for producers in the first week, distributed widely and online
- Some processors asked to be taken off the list as they couldn't handle the calls or bird numbers people wanted them to take
- Many calls with possible "solutions" on what to do with the birds, some quite creative, none really viable
- Producers holding meetings and discussions for possible options
- Calls from other provinces and states started to come in by week three



What are the potential problems?

Deal with them now – or later

- Welfare, Deadstock, Flock Health, Stress
- Public perceptions of agriculture

Who pays? Animal welfare concerns top priority.

- This is not a "government program".

Who can help?

- No CFIA, not a health concern



Who can help?

- OFAC's Animal Care Helpline service coordination
- OMAFRA staff – technical expertise (invaluable)
- OSPCA – inspection staff
- Egg Farmers of Ontario – expertise and equipment
- Brian's Poultry Service – expertise and equipment
- Feed Company – to reach their customers
- CFIA – to borrow their equipment
- Former PKI employees and holding barn owners – equipment and expertise



Communications Challenges

Contacts and statistics

- Who has pigeons?
- Who needs help? How do we reach them?
- How many barns are there? Where?
- How many birds?

Privacy and Confidentiality Issues

- Information obtained by OSPCA by warrant could not be shared
- Media asking questions about Who? Where? How many birds? Cannot be answered



Communications Challenges

Legal issues

- Who is responsible for caring for the holding barn birds?
- Who has the authority to euthanize them if need be?
- What liability issues are there for those helping with the euthanasia?

Personal Issues

- Stressful times for many people
- Hoping for better options than euthanasia



Media Challenges

Our team's objective – to deal with the producers and the pigeons quickly, confidentially and with respect

Media objective – to get their story, meet deadlines, preferably with real people and real numbers and “gore”

- Spokespeople – OMAFRA, OSPCA, OFAC all named one spokesperson each by week two
- Key messages – these evolved each week, OFAC shared with the working group
- “Heads up” on media calls



Communications Lessons

- Many people don't go online for their information.
- **Talking directly with farmers is essential.**
- Email and blackberries were invaluable, with updates and communications 24-7.
- Conference calls work and save time.
- We had NO support or consideration for emotional trauma/stress for producers or staff.
This is important!!



Communications Lessons

- It's tough to communicate about birds you know nothing about, without any names, locations, or stats!
- Media calling people on the OMAFRA resource sheet and staff directly, on cell phones – a lot – persistently.
- It was tough for the people in the field not to return media calls.
- Government can't share key messages.
- Farm media can often generate interest and pick up in urban media.



Silver Linings from Cloudy Times

- In the field: Good training experiences for many. Reconfirms the need for the commitment to continue with emergency preparedness in the field.
- Egg Farmers of Ontario: Their leadership in providing a knowledgeable field team with equipment ready was **invaluable**.
- Media: Great practice on messaging and use of central spokespeople.



Silver Linings from Cloudy Times

- The practical “get the job done” attitude of the working group, with industry and government working together, was truly impressive!
- Animal health risks would have made this a greater challenge.

No one would ever have anticipated the time, energy or resources it took to deal with this issue over five weeks.



We need more people and resources ready to go!



Communications is a tough job...



Together We Can Do Great Things.

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Contact me for a copy of the Discussion Paper on this topic.

