

## COVID-19: A LETTER FROM CANADA

**Dr. Susan Beal, DVM, South Central Ontario, Canada and Pennsylvania, sent us a COVID-19 Update from Canada, shedding light on another country's outlook and manner of coping with the pandemic, as well as sharing her thoughts and observations of what the future may hold for us all.**

I returned from traveling state-side in mid-March. I'd been staying at my PA place after traveling through the mid-west, including going to the MOSES meeting. I wasn't sure where to be. It seemed calm and "safe" in the wilds of west central PA, but the borders were beginning to be closed to other than Canadian citizens and there were other concerns percolating, too.

I had a government mandated, but not legally enforceable, two week self-quarantine upon my return. I am in a small town, a farming community of around five thousand people (many commuters) and rent a room (sharing parts of the house) with my landlady and another person. I holed up in my room, they helped me get some groceries (by delivery) and I laid low for two weeks, coming out of my room only to tend to personal hygiene needs in the bathroom a few steps from my door, shared by the other renter. Lots of cleaning after use, plus wiping the hallways and shared surfaces a couple of times daily.

The quarantine has since been legally mandated, with tracking and potential fines for those who do not comply, and is still in place. The government will pay for hotel stays for those who are unable to quarantine other places. For example, folks who live with the elderly, or those who have had their lodging reservations refused. Had I returned during the legally mandated quarantine, I would not have been able to quarantine where I did, since my landlady is over seventy years old.

There are areas of the country that have also imposed quarantines for people entering them - and there are travel restrictions between regions. There were some situations in which people who decided to travel to the northern, more isolated areas, to avoid other humans were asked to leave. Same so with the regions often populated by seasonal or vacation travelers; they asked people not to come / forbade them entry, because they did not have the infrastructure (food supply, health care services) to handle other / more than their local population.

When I returned north in March, things were really locked down. No one but essential workers were out and about. People were either working from home or were laid off, with some government support. Groceries were being delivered or had curbside pickup, though the stores were still open for those who wanted to go inside. Other businesses, like restaurants, hardware stores, greenhouses, clothing stores, malls,..... were all closed. There were some exceptions, essential services, including veterinary care, though telemedicine was encouraged. Libraries, churches, schools were all closed as were dentists, chiropractors, massage therapists, pools, ice rinks and the like. Hospitals reduced their elective work and tried hard not to hospitalize people if they could avoid it.

The streets were empty of traffic, people were walking around taking exercise but were being physically distant from one another. Everyone hung blue ribbons on doorways and trees in support of the health care and other essential workers. Contact was limited to those in your own

home, and no more than five people could gather at one time, physically distanced. That expanded to ten after a couple of months.

Most people do not wear masks on the street, particularly when it's simple to politely give people some personal space. Before the mandatory masks in indoor public places (and in outdoor places where one is unable to socially distance), about half the people would be wearing masks in stores. Now it's rare not to see people masked indoors.

Early after my return, there were some limits in food supply in the stores. Some things were not available, or not available in the preferred brand. Quantities were limited and folks could not purchase more than one or two of any item. Sometimes there were holes on shelves or in meat cases. Many people shopped by phone and had delivery or curbside pickup.

Fuel prices are back up nearly to the place they were before my winter travels. 1.02 to 1.04 / liter locally. That went down to under 0.70 / liter in April and May. Insurance companies are offering refunds / rebates on car insurance because people are not driving as much.

There was - and continues to be - a big run on farm produce: eggs, meat, farm stands and CSA. The local Mennonite lady from whom I get eggs often was out - and often had to limit the amount each customer purchased. She and other farmers in the area were inundated by folks from the city, folks who had never ventured out to buy farm eggs before this. My landlady once traveled to eight different farms in the area before she was able to find one that said, "No eggs today, but if you come back first thing Monday morning, I'll save you four dozen."

The sales in local meat shops and butchers also increased and it was tough for them to keep up with demand. The farmer from whom I get CSA share had his customers increase from the expanded forty he expected for this season to over eighty. He said he lucked out ordering seeds. He ordered in January. Had he ordered any later, he'd not have been able to obtain seeds from any of his suppliers.

I still haven't figured out the supply chain quota stuff here - but they did adjust quota and prices on poultry to allow growers to make up the lack without penalty. I do know that the poultry guys stateside (and the smaller pastured growers here) have been inundated as have other meat producers. (I'm the current president of the APPPA Board - Mike Badger, the director, would be a good interview for you, too. He's bright, perceptive and has a good idea of what's happening.....) Some have had to shift their businesses if they were dependent on the restaurant trade and start to focus on other things, but many have had a zooming increase: 500plus % increase in sales, doing more home delivery, shipping etc. There has been a run on peeps and pullets, as well as feed, because of the expansion by the pastured producers as well as the homeowner starting to address some of their worries about food security.

That's influenced the breeder flocks, too, as they're trying to push out more birds..... heck, they've just recovered from the Avian influenza massive depopulation from a couple of years ago, and were just up to running speed again. Grit is hard to find. The largest grit producer had a combination of increased demand and also a breakdown in their crusher and a long backorder on

the parts needed to repair it. A simple and ubiquitous supply like chicken grit is suddenly hard to get.

You know the slaughter houses are booked full - and many are booking into 2022. There was a rescue underway to try and shift hogs from the midwest to other places (because they couldn't get them killed and they were euthanizing them by the barnful, terminating sow pregnancies, euthanizing piglets). Sadly, even redirecting a few hundred hogs hardly makes a dent in the forty thousand that are killed daily in some plants - but it did serve to back up the small slaughter houses, often bumping regular customers in the process.

The same is true with the commercial poultry barns. Thousands upon thousands of birds were euthanized because they couldn't get them to slaughter.

The local farmers markets here were closed for months. The closest city to me (about ten miles away) is known for their farmer's market - held several times a week. It was closed until mid or late June, then reopened for outside vendors and much physical distancing. Waterloo County, Ontario is like Lancaster County, PA - and, in fact, many plain sect moved from there to here. And here to there. Many tourists come to this area, too, for the Mennonite farms and markets.

It's been very difficult to get some crops planted and harvested, particularly vegetables and tree crops, many of which are tended by visiting workers, the equivalent of the H1 program. Workers initially could not get to the country, and once they were there, needed to find a way to quarantine. Sadly, often this was in crowded, shared housing and there have been several outbreaks among the agricultural workers in the region. Fruits and vegetables were either plowed in or spoiled on the trees because of lack of ability to harvest. I spoke to a Mennonite neighbor last week, talking about peaches: very expensive at forty dollars a bushel, if you could find them. Some of the orchards were doing pick your own, but the fruits spoiled easily because they were already long on the trees before the orchard decided to try and use the pick your own means of salvaging the harvest.

There's been big pressure on the meat and dairy processing world. One meat plant in western Canada closed because of illness - and they handle 40% of the red meat in the country. It doesn't take much to grind things to a halt.

I haven't spoken much to the dairy guys here. That's been more about opportunity than anything. I've been laying low, doing most of my work by phone and email (and many of the folks with whom I work are from "off"). I've been taking a lot of CE courses, too, since there are no meetings now and many places are offering things remotely.

Many of the cases of COVID19 here have been in personal care homes and nursing homes, but there are also community acquired cases in all age brackets. Native Canadians are disproportionately represented, too, as are Black and people of color. Nearly 80% of the deaths attributed to COVID19 in Ontario were residents of long term care facilities.

The border is still closed to traffic, other than essential agriculture and business traffic. Canadians can apparently still fly to places, but there is a mandatory two week quarantine upon returning to the country.

People have a variety of feelings about all this. Some are very afraid still, others are tired. Some are afraid and tired. Folks are starting to move around more as more work and social things are available as the restrictions are beginning to lift. Cases province wide are under a hundred a day now and have been for a couple of weeks. Travel is involved in maybe a quarter of those cases, with community and institutional spread accounting for most of the others.

I've been doing some work trying to educate folks about the potential for using integrative means of strengthening immune function and enhancing resilience to infection. For example, we know there is association between some simple things, like Vitamin D levels, to resilience, response and outcome to illness, including COVID19. Same appears to be so with Zinc, Selenium and Magnesium, too.

I've also been sharing some of the information the homeopaths are providing about their clinical experiences and preventive practices. There has been some lovely work being done, particularly in nursing homes but also in individual cases, by some of my colleagues. I can send that along if you are interested.

Some people's worlds have not changed much, others have been changed in permanent and significant manners - health, work and businesses, family, finances, relationships, mental and emotional health....

It's nearly impossible to wrap one's head around how the governments are going to wrangle themselves out of the huge expenses that they are incurring, too.

It's difficult to say what's going to happen next. It's the cusp of change, it seems to me - and moving forward is a great opportunity to build a way of being that's grounded in compassion, common sense, and recognition of the interconnectedness of not only people, but businesses and nature, too.

There's a much greater awareness of this connection now than there was six months ago: how quickly and far humans are able to move and how many individuals are contacted in seemingly simple tasks and travels; the size and scope and fragility of the centralized food system; the oddities of packaging and supply chains (no yeast because no packages to put it in, milk dumped in part because can't shift processing and packing lines from institutional milk to happy homeowner milk quickly.....); food rotting in the fields because it can't be harvested or the processing facilities are shut down.....

It seems to me that the what's next is going to involve a real shift in ideas and ways of being. It's exhausting trying not to navigate some of the waters now - balancing information and misinformation, bias and reality, agendas and open minds. Having said that, it seems to me that it's short sighted to think about "going back to normal". It makes more sense and resonates with the transitions that are in the works, to look at how we can build this new way of being. Someone likened it to taking a plate and melting it down and moulding it into a cup: thinking that because

the shape is different, that it's a new thing - when, in reality, it's really the same thing just shoved into a different shape. It makes more sense, it seems to me, to make a plate - but to make it out of totally different substance, different in character and properties and makeup.

The other big question, the ongoing question, too, is this: how does each one of us have to show up, to be, in order to create this new way of being, of relating, of doing business? It's a creative time, it seems to me, even though it can sometimes be hard to be creative in the middle of all the upheaval and strife and uncertainty.

Cows help. As does being on the land and in the natural world.

My start at "fill in the blanks" turned into a letter to you... and I'm going to leave it like that. This fall is going to be tough - and it's going to take the ability to not be impulsive and careless, to be calm, self-controlled, authentic, and to think about the longer and broader consequences of our actions before we do stuff. We have to be alert, aware and have some self-control and good management. It's going to be trappy waters, for sure, with lots of opportunities and also lots of high stakes in the realm of health, business, relationships and all beings.

Steady on - and take good care.  
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