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KFC Canada adds vegan 'chicken' to menu

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THE CANADIAN PRESS

Following a five-year roasting by animal-rights activists, KFC Canada is promising improved welfare for the chickens it buys for its fast-food outlets in exchange for an end to a boycott campaign that will continue in the U.S. and elsewhere.

The Canadian Press has learned that People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals has agreed to call off its Canadian "Kentucky Fried Cruelty" campaign, which featured high-profile actress Pamela Anderson among others, following a signed agreement with the company.

Among other things, the deal obliges KFC Canada to begin buying from suppliers who use gas to kill their chickens painlessly, considered to be the least cruel method of slaughter.

The company is also promising to insist on other "animal-welfare friendly" measures relating to how the birds are kept, including a maximum on crowding and phasing out non-essential growth-hormones and other drugs.

Customers of the popular restaurant chain will also be able to order a vegan "chicken" item, according to the deal that followed almost seven months of at-times "sticky" closed-door negotiations.

"It's going to drastically reduce the suffering of chickens in slaughterhouses and also . . . improve the living conditions for animals while they're on the farm," Matt Prescott, PETA's assistant director of corporate affairs, said from Norfolk, Va.

KFC Canada president Steve Langford said he was delighted with the agreement.

"It will be nice to put this behind us," Langford said. "Our preference is to have nothing negative attached to our brand."

Langford said the Canadian operations, which are independent of those in the U.S., had chosen to take the situation into its own hands and talk to PETA about animal welfare.

"Once I got involved and we actually met face to face, we found out that we had no differences of opinion about how animals should be treated," Langford said.

"We landed in a very good place."

PETA's campaign, which garnered international attention, has included more than 12,000 protests at KFC restaurants and outside the homes of company senior executives.

Demonstrators, who have included former *Playboy* pinup Lauren Anderson, have burned effigies of company icon, Col. Sanders. Other notables such as Paul McCartney, the Dalai Lama, and Chrissie Hynde have participated in the campaign.

KFC Canada was also thrown on the defensive three years ago when PETA released horrific video showing poultry workers torturing chickens in the United States.

The company is owned by Prizm Income Fund, based in Vaughan, Ont., which operates 465 outlets across the country. The fund has been struggling to stem a flow of red ink and shore up falling share values.

Most of the 300 independent franchisees have agreed to abide by the agreement with PETA.

"It appears as though our campaign affected the bottom line to the point where the company finally had enough," Prescott said.

"That said, I also believe that KFC in Canada is genuinely concerned about animal welfare."

While the anti-KFC campaign will now end in this country, PETA said it would continue in the U.S., the U.K. and other countries. However, it is hoping to persuade Yum Brands, which owns KFC outlets in the United States, to follow the Canadian lead.

"With KFC Canada now doing exactly what we want KFC in the U.S. to do, our members and activists will be even more energetic and invigorated about going after KFC in other countries," Prescott said.

"All we want is for KFC worldwide to do what KFC Canada has done."

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