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# Complaints about noisy cowbells spark dispute in the Swiss village of Aarwangen | CBC Radio

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## [As It Happens](#)

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## **A thousand locals quickly signed an initiative in favour of protecting cowbells**



A cow grazes in a pasture near Rossiniere, Switzerland.

Cowbells, as pictured here, used to be necessary to keep track

of cattle. (Denis Balibouse/Reuters)



As It Happens6:33Complaints about noisy cowbells spark dispute in the Swiss village of Aarwangen

To some, the sound of cowbells are synonymous with the Swiss countryside. To others, they're a sleep-disrupting nuisance. And in the village of Aarwangen, Switzerland, a dispute between the two camps has reached a fever pitch.

Situated halfway between Bern and Zurich, Aarwangen is home to fewer than 5,000 people, five or six farmers and their herds of cattle. Between 50 and 100 of the cattle wear the iconic bells around their necks, according to the municipality's president Niklaus Lundsgaard-Hansen.

Two couples, who are newcomers to the area, filed complaints with the local authorities suggesting the bells should be taken off at night, [the BBC reported](#).

Lundsgaard-Hansen says cattle are allowed to graze on scenic greenland in between different housing developments

"It's quite possible that the cowbells are ten metres, 20 metres from a house," he told *As It Happens* host Nil Koksai.

Longtime residents were swift to respond to the complaints. The farmers who own the cattle took offence and "refused to make a compromise," according to Lundsgaard-Hansen. A local initiative in support of the bells quickly garnered a thousand signatures — enough to force a public vote.

While Lundsgaard-Hansen says he's in favour of the bells, the initiative is "not a very helpful instrument." Issues over the bells should be resolved on a case-by-case basis through "discussions and negotiations and not by formal rules," he said.

The original complaint has since been elevated to the regional government level. A state representative is expected to make a decision on the matter within the next month.

[According to the BBC](#), one of the initial objectors has withdrawn their complaint, while the other has moved away from the town.

The row has inspired an exhibit at the Langenthal Museum, which explores "how everyday sound can become disruptive noise and whether a traditional soundscape in rural Oberaargau should even be preserved as the 'sound of home,'" according to a description on the [museum's website](#) translated from German.

"Debates like in Aarwangen are not about noise, volume or decibel levels — they're about tolerance," Jana Fehrensén, the museum's director, [told Swissinfo](#).

It's not the first time cowbell disputes in Switzerland have reached such heights. In 2016, a Dutch woman was [denied her application for a Swiss passport](#) because locals were disgruntled with her claims that the heavy bells caused the bovines pain, the BBC reported. A spokesperson for the municipality, however, said the rejection was due to media attention around her claims.

Townpeople will vote on whether to officially protect both cow and church bells in December.

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR



Abby Hughes does a little bit of everything at CBC News in Toronto. She has a bachelor's degree in journalism from Toronto Metropolitan University. You can reach her at [abby.hughes@cbc.ca](mailto:abby.hughes@cbc.ca).

Interview with Niklaus Lundsgaard-Hansen produced by Katie Geleff