

The News Feed

An Ontario Cattle Feeders' Publication



Summer 2020 Edition

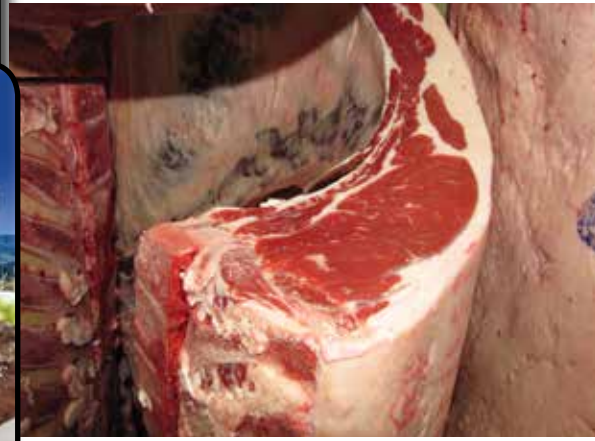


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Working Through COVID-19



The global pandemic is drastically affecting the beef and food value chain. Also, in this issue: The 4Rs of nutrient stewardship and the impact of corn test weight on cattle performance.

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Living Through An Expensive History Lesson



Jim Clark, Executive Director

As our lives have changed dramatically since the COVID-19 pandemic, my largest concern is the wellbeing of our farmers and their families. Furthermore, we think about the safety of the general public and our health care workers as well as the staff working in the retail stores and the processors.

There are so many parts to our value chain that sometimes you forget some of them until you see it all placed in front of you. I have found that this pandemic gives you time to reflect on all aspects of our lives and the business. For this generation, we have never lived through something like this before. We've had viruses in the past, but we seemed to have more options to deal with them. With this COVID-19 pandemic, society, for the most part, has been shut down.

I see it now as a history lesson that we're living through, and it is a costly lesson when you think about how it has affected us in so many different ways. You think about what people are going through, the loss of loved ones and the economic

crisis that it has caused. The impact will linger for many years going forward, and there are definitely going to be some major scars.

When reflecting on this current situation, I can't help but think back to the phone call in 2003 when a trader on the other end of the line told me, "You guys have a major problem – you've got BSE in Canada." I'll never forget that day. One minute you're taking a sip of coffee, and then suddenly, the whole world turned upside down in the beef business, and the industry went into crisis mode. It's taken so many years to get through that crisis, and you continue to see parts of the business that are still affected by it.

For the beef industry, the last number of years have already been tough for the cattle business, particularly for the fed cattle side of it. We see a disconnect from the value of beef. Whereas consumer beef prices have trended upwards and demand has been good, cattle prices in Eastern Canada continue to trend downward. The cattle market has been dysfunctional. The pandemic crisis is intensifying the problem by driving so much more uncertainty into the marketplace. I can only imagine being one of the processors, dealing with the staffing issues on a daily basis and trying to keep the labour pool safe and keep the plant running. We see the challenges playing out in Western Canada as plants scale back operations or have been shut down, and concerns grow as we know this affects everyone's bottom line.

This situation is why I'm talking about a history lesson because we will be looking at not only the entire economic cost, but we'll also be assessing the future impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the cattle industry. It's the one question that I'm faced with, and it comes up often in my conversations. People are reaching out more than ever as the issue is top of mind. People want second opinions. They want to know if there is light at the end of the tunnel. Is it a real light? Or, is it the



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STAFF

Publisher: Jim Clark, Exec. Dir.
Ontario Cattle Feeders' Association
Managing Editor: Blair Andrews
Design/Layout: Eric Broadbent
Advertising: Blair Andrews

OFFICE

The Ontario Cattle Feeders' Association
25 Enterprise Drive
London, ON N6N 1A3

PH: (519) 686-6226
FAX: (519) 686-6227
Web: www.ontariocornfedbeef.com
Email: info@ontariocornfedbeef.com

Subscriptions: (519) 686-6226
info@ontariocornfedbeef.com
Advertising: (519) 437-9219
Email: thenewsfeed@cogeco.ca

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light on a freight train that's coming through the tunnel? What is the cattle business going to look like moving forward? As much as this crisis brings me down, I can only imagine – and I can feel it from the calls and discussions – how it's affecting everyone from a business perspective.

For the Ontario Cattle Feeders' Association and Ontario Corn Fed Beef, we've tried to maintain our business operations. I have kept the office open, and I have been here since the province announced the measures to limit the spread of the virus. But the staff members are not here. They have been working from home. One of the good things about technology is that you can do so much more now from home. John Baker continues to work on the marketing side of the business. We know that there will be a time when the marketing is going to be essential as our customers are looking forward to the future. For example, Loblaw's is planning the summer tour featuring Ontario Corn Fed Beef. We don't know what that is going to look like yet, but we're looking at ways to move forward with it. John is also working with various international groups on marketing promotions so we can hit the ground running when we get past this crisis. Now more than ever, marketing is going to be vital. When you look at Japan, our regional partners are planning summer promotions to drive volume. We remain committed to our distribution partners and customers who also want to launch Ontario branded beef programs in the different marketplaces.

China seems to be emerging from the crisis, which is why you're seeing us working on promotional events and looking forward to the opportunities that exist there. We also have strong business relationships in the Middle East. We continue to work on promotional programs in that region. While a lot will depend on the reopening of steakhouses, we have also been

focusing heavily on the home delivery segment in Dubai and Abu Dhabi.

When it comes to consumption, it's difficult to predict how people are going to react as businesses gradually reopen. Given the disruption in the supply chains and the economy, Canadians may not eat beef in the same way as before the pandemic. Things could constrict here quite heavily. That's why it is crucial to focus on international markets. These areas have larger populations, and if they continue to eat beef, it means so much to the overall picture of our cattle markets.

Besides marketing, Brent Cavell and Chelsea Martin continue to work on the Quality Assurance side of the business, working on the manuals and program updates. They have also been busy on the phones, talking to producers, sending emails about quality assurance and doing what you can on a limited capacity. We're fortunate to have Brent's experience in the feed side of the business because our feedlots are facing issues with the slowdown in the ethanol industry. Besides the impact on grain markets, the downturn has also had a significant effect on the by-products of ethanol, creating a shortage of distillers' grains, which is a big part of our business. Brent has been focusing some of his time on this issue, working with producers to find different feed alternatives. We want to help build the diets to ensure we maintain the strong performance of our Ontario Corn Fed cattle.

While we work to maintain our usual business activities, another part of the job is to pull ourselves above what is happening now and look to the future. I continually focus on staff and resources because we are going to get through this. We're in the darkest hours, but we're going to get past this. And when we do, what does

that look like? Not only tomorrow but how are things going to look in a year from tomorrow and five years from tomorrow? So, that's where I spend a lot of time looking ahead and realizing that there are many variables and things that are unpredictable. But at the same time, we have to continue to move that path beyond today forward.

Also, we have been working to support our provincial and national beef organizations in their lobbying efforts. We're trying to help the Beef Farmers of Ontario (BFO) with its priorities and be supportive. It's crucial that we work from the same page. While we're focused on marketing in our agreement with BFO - at the heart of it all - there's no marketing without cattle producers. So, we're focused on working together to help drive the industry forward and to look at what's needed financially to support the cattle producers, both provincially and nationally.

Finally, I think it's important to thank everyone for what they're doing to help get through these trying times. Our gratitude goes well beyond our members and the people we deal with regularly. Everyone needs to be reflective and recognize we're all getting through this together. Remember you're not alone. If you or someone you know is struggling with the stress, there are resources to help. The Ontario Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs lists many of these resources on its website, including the Mental Health Helpline at 1-866-531-2600.

As I mentioned earlier, I do believe it's always darkest before the light, and that is where we are now. I think there are some excellent opportunities down the road, and we need to focus on getting through where we are and driving towards the future. Stay healthy and stay safe.



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OCFA Sets Leadership For 2020



Mike Conlin, President, OCFA, OCFB

The Ontario Cattle Feeders' Association is pleased to announce that Mike Conlin will serve another term as President of the OCFA. Mike farms north of Lucan, Ont. with his father Tony and Uncle Jack, along with his wife Jen and children Emily, Allie, Peter and Tom.

Al Noorloos will serve as Vice President. Al, together with his wife Marlene and their two sons, work in Lambton County near Sarnia, Ont. They farm approximately 1,300 acres and feed about 1,800 cattle. Al, along with his brother John and his late father Tony, were among the first to be part of the Ontario Corn Fed Beef (OCFB) program.

Jack Chaffe is the Second Vice President. Jack and his wife Diane live north of Mitchell, Ont. Jack and his family operate a large feedlot operation and market over 2,500 head of cattle per year through the OCFB program. Jack also serves as Vice President of the Beef Farmers of Ontario.

Meanwhile, long-time board member Dale Palister is stepping down. A founding member of the association more than 20 years ago, the producer from the Dundalk-Highlands area of Grey County has served the OCFA well in several positions on the board, including President. "Dale and his family are very passionate about the beef industry," says Mike Conlin. "The Ontario Cattle Feeders thank Dale and his family for his many years of service. Personally, it has been a pleasure to work with him, and he will be greatly missed."

OCFB Marketing Update



Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, several marketing events for Ontario Corn Fed Beef in key export markets have been postponed to a later date.

Based on feedback from distribution partners, both domestically and in export markets, we feel that we are very well-positioned for a strong recovery coming out of the COVID-19 situation.

The strong partnerships and relationships that have been developed over the past 20 years will provide a solid foundation to restart many of the initiatives that have already been in various phases of planning or implementation before the pandemic stalled them.

Japan Market Development:

Before the international marketing events were postponed, OCFB was represented at the Supermarket Trade Show (SMTS) in Tokyo, Japan in February. The show attracted over 50,000 visitors from the retail supermar-

ket and foodservice sectors from all across Asia. "Events like SMTS provide a great opportunity to meet with new retail customers," says John Baker, Director of the newly formed Ontario Beef Market Development program.

The growth of OCFB in Japan has been built on the market's desire for high-quality brands that offer unique attributes. Ontario Corn Fed Beef is now marketed in 17 retail outlets in every region across Japan.

The event was also the platform for the initial launch of the Ontario Heritage Angus Beef program in Japan. The brand was developed exclusively for St. Helen's Meat Packers and provides them with a high-quality Ontario branded beef program with identifiable quality attributes.

The program, which is based on cattle certified under the Ontario Corn Fed Beef Quality Assurance program, provides assurance to the Japanese customers around quality, safety and consistency.

"Opportunities exist for additional unique brands of Ontario beef in Japan," says Baker. "Ontario Heritage Angus Beef provides St. Helen's and their distributor partners with a unique premium brand exclusive to them."



BFO Announces New Leadership



Rob Lipsett, President BFO

The Board of Directors of the Beef Farmers of Ontario (BFO) elected their new president and vice president at BFO's 58th Annual General Meeting held in Toronto in February. Rob Lipsett will lead the association in the year ahead as president with Jack Chaffe serving as vice president. BFO Past President, Joe Hill, has stepped down after completing the maximum three terms on the BFO Board of Directors.

Embarking on his seventh year on the BFO Board, Lipsett has served on the board for six years as a background director. He and his family run a 140-cow cow-calf operation near Annan, Ontario and purchase 75-100 calves to background along with their farm-born calves.

"Ontario has a vast population demanding high-quality, safe food, and the Ontario beef industry has a great story to tell to fill this demand," said Lipsett, following his appointment. "As president, I look forward to working with my fellow directors in the year ahead to address pressing issues, such as processing capacity, to help stabilize the industry, increase profitability for our producers, and put more Ontario beef on store shelves, menus and dinner tables across the province."

Jack Chaffe from Perth County will enter his fifth year on the board as a feedlot director and will move to the position of vice president.

Farm Groups Urge Government To Fully Fund RMP

Beef Farmers of Ontario, Grain Farmers of Ontario, Veal Farmers of Ontario, and the Ontario Sheep Farmers are asking the Premier and the Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs to immediately move to fully fund the Ontario Risk Management Program (RMP) to help over 50,000 Ontario farmers continue to deliver food for the people of Ontario.

In a news release, the groups state that COVID-19 impacts have exacerbated the challenges already faced by Ontario's grain and livestock farmers, and immediate support is needed to ensure our farmers can continue to deliver local, quality food to Ontarians.

Many Ontario farmers in the non-supply managed sectors are in crisis without access to sufficient safety net support that programs like RMP provide.

In the last election, Ontario's Premier campaigned to increase much-needed funding for the Ontario RMP, recognizing the critical underfunding of the program in recent years and its importance to the agri-food sector and Ontario economy.

COVID-19 has amplified financial challenges facing our family farms and induced market and production disruptions that threaten the food supply and viability of farm operations. Fully funding the RMP will provide the essential security Ontario farmers need to continue to provide food for Ontarians and keep rural Ontario's communities and economy strong during this time of crisis.

"Farmers are asking the province of Ontario to share in the risk that it takes for a farmer to grow food for the province and the country – the RMP program is not a bailout," said Markus Haerle, Chair of Grain Farmers of Ontario. "Farmers are risking their livelihoods, and a fully-funded RMP would only provide support if the cost of growing the crop isn't covered by the price," added Haerle.

"Farm operations can't wait any longer for support from our provincial government. It's absolutely imperative that this safety net is put in place to ensure beef operations and the beef supply chain can continue to provide Ontari-

ans with access to local food," said Rob Lipsett, President of the Beef Farmers of Ontario. "RMP is the right mechanism to provide stability to the sector."

"RMP has proven to be a predictable program that works for farmers. With the uncertainty and volatility we are facing, veal farmers need the reassurance that this program provides so we can weather this crisis. However, the program desperately needs the additional funding that the Premier and the Minister promised to be put in place immediately," said Pascal Bouilly, Chair of Veal Farmers of Ontario.

"This crisis has highlighted the fact that the current Risk Management Program in Ontario is inadequate to deal with this kind of acute risk. The program needs to change to provide more support for our farmers against a growing number of unforeseen risks," said Marc Carere, Chair of Ontario Sheep Farmers.

The groups said Ontario's response to the broader health and economic crisis has thus far been strong and efficient.

While they applaud the Premier and the Ontario government's efforts to keep Ontarians healthy and position the economy for a strong rebound, they note the time to act for farmers and Ontario's food supply is now.

"The RMP has an allowance that the Province can make changes to the program 'in case of an extraordinary market or production disruption.' If COVID-19 does not represent extraordinary market conditions, we don't know what does," the groups' statement said.

"By making sure the funding is not limited by an arbitrary funding cap put in place by the previous government, an uncapped RMP will give farmers in Ontario the confidence to invest in their food production systems."

COVID-19 Compounds Cattle Market Woes



Brian Perillat, Canfax Manager and Senior Analyst

The COVID-19 pandemic struck the cattle markets with an incredible amount of volatility and uncertainty. Driven by the impact of physical distancing measures on the economy and the reduction of beef processing capacity at several plants in North America due to the challenges brought forth by the pandemic, cattle prices dropped across the country.

Brian Perillat, Manager and Senior Analyst of Canfax, says fed cattle prices in Western Canada started the year at a higher level than last year, in the range of \$1.60 to \$1.64 per pound in Alberta. By March, they dropped down into the \$1.40 range. Prices fell again as the plant in High River announced it was temporarily reducing shifts starting the week of April 13. The following week, the plant officials announced it would be temporarily idling operations.

“Typically, into March-April, we start to see strong prices and with the plant down, we lost another \$200 to \$300 per head due to restricted kill levels in Western Canada,” said Perillat.

The plant in Brooks, Alberta has also reduced processing capabilities due to the COVID-19 challenges. Combined, the Canadian Cattle-men’s Association says these plants comprise 70 per cent of Canada’s overall federally inspected beef processing capabilities.

In Eastern Canada, where the farmers have already been struggling with reduced packing plant capacity, the COVID-19 crisis has intensified their losses. Prices were in the \$1.50-range in late January, but have since dropped into the low \$1.40s in April. “Prices were depressed relative to Alberta to start the year, and we’ve seen that the last few winters in Ontario; lots of cattle, lack of packing capacity then Ryding-Regency (closed). It just made it that much tougher,” said Perillat.

With losses mounting in the feedlot sector, the other areas are also feeling the pressure. “If you’re selling a feeder calf now, you see drastically lower prices with lower demand for these feeder cattle going forward,” said Perillat. “There are cases where guys have backgrounded feeders over the winter, and they’re barely getting the money back for what they paid for that calf last fall. There’s some pretty tough market conditions for them to be selling into right now.”

Although he doesn’t like to use the word “hope,” in a market outlook, Perillat says it may be appropriate for the cow-calf sector if there’s a more functional marketplace that occurs by

the fall. “(And) they won’t have to ride out quite the roller coaster that the feedlots will,” he added. “But on the other hand, if feedlots continue to lose money and come through a tough summer market, overall demand is still probably going to be a little bit lower than usual. They may have to readjust their price expectations for the fall as well.”

On the beef side of the marketplace, the pandemic created a significant shift from foodservice to retail. It also caused a change in demand for the different types of beef. “We’re selling a lot of ground beef but the middle meats – not so much,” said Perillat.

Sales of the higher value cuts could rise with the arrival of grilling season, and beef consumption will see a boost.

Still, increasing activity at the packing plants, changes in overall consumer consumption patterns and increased exports will be key factors for helping the cattle markets. “It looks like there’s good potential for exporting red meat and beef into Asia,” said Perillat. “There are opportunities as China continues to grow as a beef importer. If we do see our demand being a little more stagnant this year, then some of the exports will help cushion the blow a little bit to our cattle markets, too.”



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Corn Prices Fall As Coronavirus Crushes Ethanol Industry



Matthew Pot, Economist and author of Grain Perspectives

Besides the usual practice of tracking acreage numbers and weather forecasts in the weeks ahead, traders will also be paying close attention to fuel and food consumption stats as the corn market reacts to the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic.

With all but essential businesses closing and people following the physical distancing measures, gasoline demand has plummeted, which has had a devastating effect on the ethanol industry. As U.S. ethanol production uses approximately half of the American corn production, corn prices also suffered significant losses in the wake of the pandemic.

“When it comes down to the use of ethanol, we’re losing a share of the global market; it’s not just a North American problem,” says Matthew Pot, economist and author of Grain Perspectives. “We don’t know the full extent of this virus. We don’t know the implications it will have, and we don’t know what that means to the long-term driving.”

Pot notes that gasoline consumption in the U.S. has dropped more than 40 per cent in the early weeks of the pandemic. Quoting stats from the U.S. Energy Information Administration, gasoline consumption for the week ending April 17 was 5.311 million barrels per day (bpd). For the week ending March 6, the number was 9.449 million bpd.

“When it comes down to energy, it’s permanently lost demand that is being added to the (corn) balance sheet,” adds Pot. “They’re not going to pick up the consumption elsewhere.”

The destruction of the fuel demand comes at a time when American farmers were getting ready to plant more corn acres this spring. In its March 31 Prospective Plantings Report, the United States Department of Agriculture estimated the acreage at 97 million acres, up eight per cent from last year.

In addition to the ethanol market, the COVID-19-related closures are wreaking havoc in the feed markets. While some think feed consumption will increase as farmers hold onto their livestock, others believe farmers may cut back or look for other alternatives. With the biggest markets for corn in trouble, Pot says the best bet to get the corn markets excited might be exports. Prices rallied on April 22 on news that China was ready to buy 20 million tonnes of corn.

While positive in the short-term, Pot says rallies in the market now could push acreage numbers higher, which could be bearish in the long run. “From a market perspective, it’s a serious fundamental problem,” he notes. “Your best bet as a corn farmer is you want to see this market remain under pressure. If we rally too prematurely, we’re adding to the balance sheet. We’re

dealing with a lot of uncertainty.”

What’s more, Pot explains that the potential for short-covering rallies is limited this year as the speculative funds would have been twice as short at this time last year. “The funds are essentially right now as we speak (April 24) around 1 billion bushels less short than a year ago at this time,” he says. “That’s pretty significant when you think about the difference of the fundamentals. So, if we get a weather scare, the unfortunate part of that is there is less potential for short-covering even though we have very bearish fundamentals in play.”

With the likelihood of exports and short-covering having limited potential to move the corn prices, Pot says the markets will be monitoring the speed of the economic recovery and looking for changes in consumption. “The way you look at consumer indexes is something you should probably watch closely in the corn market more than you ever have before,” notes Pot. “We’re seeing significant declines in the U.S. and Canada in what the consumer is thinking right now.”

How the consumption patterns will play out seems to be anyone’s guess as the COVID-19 pandemic has plunged the economy and society into uncharted territory. “What we’re historically seeing is the biggest and quickest shift in food consumption trends that we have ever seen when it comes to how people are consuming their food, and that would shock any supply chain,” says Pot. “And it’s not necessarily the consumers’ choice from the onset. It’s just what happens when government intervention, right or wrong, influences the demand or the consumer trend.”

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Corn Test Weight - Does It Affect Performance of Cattle?



Source: Virtual Beef, a technology transfer vehicle of the Ontario Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs. Written by Megan Van Schaik, OMAFRA Beef Cattle Specialist

The 2019 growing season presented challenges in many parts of the province. Delayed planting and variation in maturity at harvest resulted in variability in the grade of the corn crop in Ontario. When corn fails to reach physiological maturity (black layer) before a frost, there are potential consequences to test weight. This has left many livestock producers asking, “what is the impact of low test weight corn on the performance of my livestock?” We can look to research that has been done on finishing cattle to help answer this question.

Corn quality is assessed using standard measurements. If you take corn to the local elevator, your corn will be graded, and you will be

paid accordingly. Test weight is one factor that is considered as part of the grading scheme, and thus light test weight corn is often discounted according to elevator discount schedules. Minimum test weights are specified for each grade in the Official Grain Grading Guide by the Canadian Grain Commission. Test weight is a measure of grain density; it is measured by weighing a known volume of grain, and in Canada, it is assessed before removing cracked corn and foreign material. Samples are graded sample weight if the test weight is lower than the minimum test weight established for corn. In Canada, test weight is expressed as kilograms per hectolitre (kg/hL) or grams per 0.5 litres (g/0.5 L), but test weight is also commonly referred to as bushel weight, expressed as pounds per bushel (lb/bu).

Is corn test weight a good predictor of the feeding value of corn for cattle? Several studies have looked at the impact of light test weight corn on cattle performance, most of which found

little to no performance differences in cattle fed moderately low-test weight corn (59.3 kg/hL or 46.18 lb/bu) versus normal test weight corn.

In a published study by Weichenthal et al. (1999), light-test weight corn (59.2-61.5 kg/hL or 46 to 48 lb/bu) and normal corn (72 kg/hL or 56 lb/bu) were fed to cattle consuming growing and finishing diets in a beef feedlot. The growing diet consisted of 32.9% corn silage, 22.3% alfalfa haylage, 37% dry rolled corn, and 7.8% protein supplement on a dry matter basis, and the finishing diet included 9.2% corn silage, 86.2% dry rolled corn and 4.6% protein supplement on a dry matter basis. Average daily gain, feed efficiency, and carcass measurements were similar between treatment groups in both growing and finishing cattle. Birkelo et al. (1994) used metabolism facilities to study energy partitioning and net energy estimates of finishing diets that consisted of 77.7% light test weight (52.6 kg/hL or 40.8 lb/bu) or normal test weight (69.3 kg/hL or 53.8 lb/bu) whole corn. They found that low

test weight corn was slightly greater in net energy for maintenance and gain due to reduced fecal losses associated with low test weight corn and concluded that low test weight corn is not inherently lower in net energy content than normal test weight corn.

A study out of North Dakota State University found slightly different results. The study looked at the impact of feeding high (68.5 kg/hL or 53.7 lb/bu), medium (60.1 kg/hL or 46.9 lb/bu), and low test weight corn (50.4 kg/hL or 39.1 kb/bu) to finishing steers, and while they found that test weight did not impact performance in terms of ADG, they did observe a response of increasing dry matter intake and feed:gain (F:G) with decreasing test weight, suggesting that it may take more light test weight corn to achieve the same gains. The authors concluded that cattle feeders buying low test-weight corn must assess the benefits of taking advantage of discounts on low test corn versus the potential for reduced F:G.

Collectively this research tells us that it is important to analyze and consider all nutrients and use current net energy equations when formulating rations and determining feeding rates. Although starch content tends to be lower in low test weight corn, low test weight corn often has higher protein, fibre, and mineral concentrations, and the rate of starch digestion may differ between low-test weight corn and normal test-weight corn. These research outcomes also serve as a good reminder that it is important to add ingredients to the ration by weight rather than by volume.

In short, corn with moderately low-test weight does not appear to impact the performance of cattle. However, with every new crop commodity or ingredient introduced to your ration, it is important to understand the quality and nutritional attributes of your feed inputs and monitor the condition and performance of your cattle. Work with your feed advisor to balance your rations and identify and mitigate risks associated with quality issues.

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USDA Forecasting Increase In Corn And Soybean Acres

The United States Department of Agriculture expects American farmers to plant 97 million acres of corn in 2020, up 8% from last year. The USDA released its eagerly anticipated Prospective Plantings report on March 31. The agency is forecasting a larger soybean acreage at 83.5 million acres, up 10% from last year.

All wheat planted area for 2020 is estimated at 44.7 million acres, down 1% from 2019. This represents the lowest all wheat planted area since records began in 1919. The 2020 winter wheat planted area, at 30.8 million acres, is down 1% from last year and down slightly from the previous estimate. Of this total, about 21.7 million acres are Hard Red Winter, 5.69 million acres are Soft Red Winter, and 3.42 million acres are White Winter.

The area expected to be planted to other spring wheat for 2020 is estimated at 12.6 million acres, down 1 per cent from 2019. Of this total, about 11.9 million acres are Hard Red Spring wheat. Durum planted area for 2020 is expected to total 1.29 million acres, down four per cent from the previous year.

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The 4Rs Of Nutrient Stewardship



Dale Cowan, Senior Agronomist with the AGRIS and Wanstead Cooperatives, discusses the 4R Nutrient Stewardship Certification program at the 2020 Seed Corn Growers of Ontario AGM.

The Ontario agriculture industry is stepping up to the plate to demonstrate its commitment to improving the environment without sacrificing farmers' ability to be productive. In recent months, farmers and other industry players have been hearing about the 4Rs, using the Right Source of nutrients at the Right Rate and Right Time in the Right Place. Formally known as the 4R Nutrient Stewardship Certification program, the voluntary initiative encourages ag retailers, service providers and other certified professionals to adopt proven best management practices (BMPs) through the 4Rs.

It was officially launched in 2018 and is being implemented through a Memorandum of Co-operation that was formalized in 2015. Ontario's version is based on the program being adopted by agri-retailers in Ohio.

Dale Cowan, Senior Agronomist with the AGRIS and Wanstead Cooperatives, highlighted the program during a presentation to the Seed Corn Growers of Ontario annual general meet-

ing on March 9. Cowan noted that the need to address the algal blooms in the western basin of Lake Erie underscores the importance of 4R Stewardship and the ag industries' shared commitment to improving the water quality in the area.

"In the Lake Erie Action Plan, the 4R Stewardship plan is mentioned as good voluntary practices for producers and industry to follow to mitigate nutrient loss," said Cowan. "So that kind of puts it back on us to be able to demonstrate our ability to look after our own affairs. We need to take a leadership role, and it's a good fit with the sustainability programs coming forward in other areas."

A 4R Ontario Steering Committee worked closely with the Nutrient Stewardship Council, the Ohio Agri-Business Association and The Fertilizer Institute in the U.S. to create the 4R standards that are aimed at minimizing nutrient losses to improve water quality while also increasing agricultural activity.

In his presentation, Cowan noted that the efficient use of nutrients from mineral fertilizers, manure or other sources minimizes nutrient losses to the ground and surface water resources. The 4R Nutrient Stewardship gives farmers practical, evidence-based solutions that benefit both the environment and farm profitability. "It's providing farmers with best-management practices, good science, and to be able to sustainably farm and look after the environment at the same time," he said. "We can't be all about the environment and no profits. We can't certainly be about profits and don't care about the environment. It's marrying the two together."

The 4R Nutrient Stewardship BMPs are customized to fit each farm's unique climatic soil, cropping and operational conditions. These standards and the corresponding evidence to meet those standards will be audited by a private third-party to provide a consistent, recognized program for Ontario agri-retailers. "Farmers never see an auditor," said Cowan of the process. "It's all done at the retail level to make sure they're doing the right things, making good recommendations and (adopting) good best management practices."

On BMPs, Cowan said it's vital to make fertilizer recommendations that are based on science and soil testing. Compliance with the audit process and agronomic advice begins using current soil test results that are no more than four years old. "We want to be descriptive, predictive and prescriptive," said Cowan. "There really is no mystery in managing nutrients if we keep soil samples current and work with knowledgeable people to interpret that."

For more about the 4R Nutrient Stewardship, visit Fertilizer Canada's website at fertilizercanada.ca. According to the site, more than 113,000 acres of farmland in Ontario can be attributed to 4R Nutrient Stewardship, with roughly 67 per cent of farms implementing some form of this nutrient planning and management method.

United States Cattle On Feed Down 5 Per Cent

Cattle and calves on feed for the slaughter market in the United States for feedlots with capacity of 1,000 or more head totalled 11.3 million head on April 1, 2020. The inventory was 5 per cent below April 1, 2019. The inventory included 7.08 million steers, down 5 per cent from the previous year. This group accounted for 63 per cent of the total inventory. Heifers accounted for 4.22 million head, down 7 per cent from 2019.

Placements in feedlots during March totalled 1.56 million head, 23 per cent below 2019. Placements were the lowest for March since the series began in 1996. Net placements were 1.50 million head. During March, placements of cattle and calves weighing less than 600 pounds were 310,000 head, 600-699 pounds were 220,000 head, 700-799 pounds were 410,000 head, 800-899 pounds were 402,000 head, 900-999 pounds were 155,000 head, and 1,000 pounds and greater were 60,000 head.

Marketings of fed cattle during March totalled 2.01 million head, 13 per cent above 2019. Marketings were the second highest for March since the series began in 1996.



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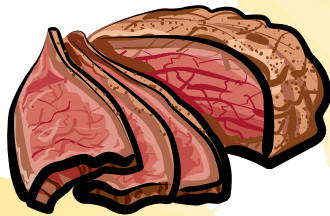
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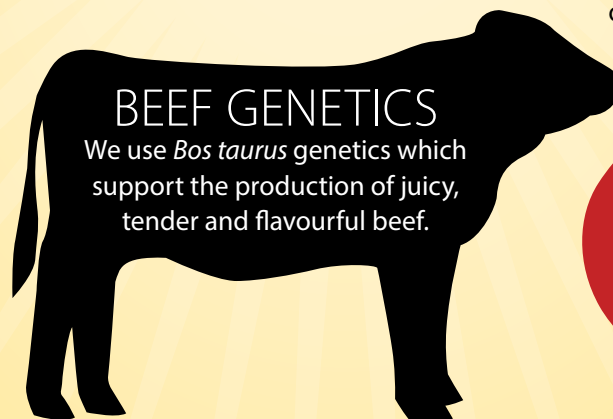
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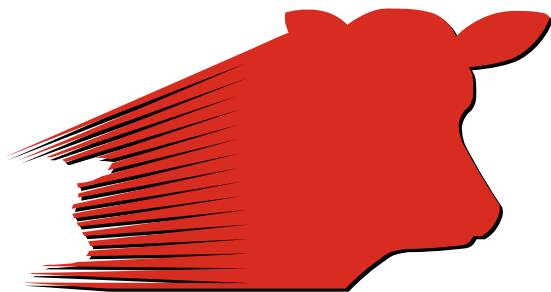
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