

The News Feed

An Ontario Cattle Feeders' Publication



Summer 2022 Edition



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Promotional efforts for the Ontario Corn Fed Beef brand received a substantial boost in recent weeks with the return of significant in-person food industry events in Toronto and Japan.

Also in this issue: Managing Beef on Dairy Crosses. Details inside.

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From The Desk Of Jim Clark



Jim Clark, Executive Director

I have had a few people comment to me that after reading previous News Feed articles, they feel I am being pretty optimistic with respect to the Ontario feedlot sector. The sentiment is almost, "what colour is the sky in your world, Jim?" To answer that question, "Hell yes," I am optimistic about the future of Ontario beef, and I am sure it just isn't me who feels that way!

There must be many more than just me who feel the way I do, including a few bankers! Just look at the new expansions and barns going up, with more to come. Is there some grumbling going on? Yes! Are people worried about the cost of feed, replacements, and business in general? Yes! But what else do you do? Turning the key off and waiting or closing down for the day is not an option. Either you're in, or you're out!

The Ontario feedlot family of today can best be described as competitive, creative, very productive, and most of all, very innovative! Do they like to gamble? Most will tell you not. But let's face it, every day in the cattle business is a gamble as so many things are out of our control and normally all the chips are on the table.

On the odd day, it feels like the farming business is sometimes a long list of "the bad news." Fortunately, farmers are quite resourceful; this is not simply our ability to temporarily fix nearly anything with twine string and, on occasion, supplemental duct tape.

The biggest issue I see coming down the pipe is inflation and the interest rates. It didn't seem like it was that many years ago when we had tractors and manure spreaders sitting in front of the banks in small-town Ontario. Interest rates were cresting in the high 20 per cent range. I think we all knew that there would be some form of inflation, especially with the way governments were forking out pandemic relief. So, I think it is fair for everyone to step back and get a bit itchy when they see the price of everything continually rising.

One thing inflation eventually will drive is the purchasing habits that we have on the farm and that consumers have in their households. It also creates opportunities along with reality checks. Yes, the price of food is rising along with everything else. I am not even going to talk about the rising price of fuel as it would take someone much smarter than me to explain why the price of fuel is so high when Canada has the most natural resources anywhere in the world. In addition, we have more capacity to refine here in Eastern Canada, but I am going to leave that to the experts!

Back to food, Canadians and basically everyone in North America have long enjoyed an abundance of food with so many different options to meet the desires of everyone. Yet you often heard that food was so expensive here in our grocery stores.

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The reality is that the price of food here in North America is pretty reasonable when you consider we only spend between seven and eleven per cent of our take-home pay on the food we buy. I am not talking about the price of prepared products, as some of the value-added products did deem more in the marketplace, and consumers were willing to pay for that. But when you look at the price of proteins, vegetables, and bread? Come on! We have become a society that maybe has forgotten what is important to our families and us. We have spent the smallest portion of our income on food of any country in the world.

So, you may ask how “does the meat of this relate” to the opening of this article? Well, it is all part of my belief that beef will become a luxury item for many, especially the good cuts. Yes, the price has gone up and will go up, and we are not used to this kind of jump in the retail prices that we see at the meat counter. But in all honesty, maybe it is time for a bit of a correction or reality check as in the past number of years, nobody seemed to blink at the price of that big flat-screen TV!

Just think of this: We spend an average of 10 per cent on food while many others around the world spend between 40 and 60 per cent of their income on food. For these reasons, that is why I believe the price of beef will remain strong as it will be driven by extremely robust export markets. Now that people who normally ate small amounts of beef have tasted the great beef we produce daily on our farms, they have grown a desire to eat more of the premium cuts of beef and protein as part of their daily diet. They are also willing to pay for that luxury as they now value their ability to access top-quality, safe and nutritious food due to the growth in trade and the way we move food products and

beef around the world!

Ontario is very well positioned due to our geographic location. The biggest challenge that I see from the farmer's perspective is the strong pull to cash in on the surging cash crop prices and forget the cattle. This may work for some, but in the long run, I have always believed that a long-term plan that is well-executed beats jumping all over the place.

With that in mind, I do feel that some of the feeders will not put cattle in again and take advantage of the cash crop scenario. But many others have built some strong infrastructure, brought the family into the business and investment in human staffing infrastructure that now plays a major role in their operations. Cattle feeding, in general, has become a big, integrated family business, and these businesses incorporate many things that all come together to make it work. So, what truly is the price of your corn in the silage pile? I guess that depends on how sharp your pencil is when you figure it out, and only you know what is in there!

When I was young and used to go to farms sorting cattle with my brother sometime in the 1980s, I recall the high-interest rates and that cattle prices were in a slump. I remember a wise farmer named Bill Anderson from Thamesville once saying, “these cattle sure look nice, but they won't make much money. But that manure that's left over is the gold and worth more than you think.”

Some forty years later, I have finally figured out that he maybe had a good point in looking at the price of fertilizer this year. One other thing my dad often said to me was, “Jim, move over. I think it is time you let me drive the spreader for a while!”

To everyone, have a safe and happy summer!

Advancing Canada's Global Reputation For Top-Quality Beef

Canada's livestock producers and processors have built a strong reputation for delivering high-quality, safe and delicious beef. On April 25, the Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food, the Honourable Marie-Claude Bibeau, announced an investment of up to \$3.6 million to ensure the beef industry has the necessary resources to seize new export opportunities to remain competitive and continue to be a sustainable driver of economic growth.

Under the AgriMarketing Program, this funding will be used to support Canada Beef's efforts to boost beef and veal exports globally through initiatives that aim to increase trust in Canada's beef sector. Project activities will help to bolster Canada's global beef brand and build stronger relationships with global trading partners. This will help producers become more competitive and grow beef sales in important international markets while supporting the continued growth and success of the Canadian beef industry, which contributes billions to Canada's GDP.

In addition, this project will support training and e-learning activities at the Canadian Beef Centre of Excellence (CBCE), a state-of-the-art training facility. These activities will help the industry increase knowledge around the advantages of Canadian beef, enable it to promote the excellence of Canadian beef and help to increase public trust in beef products.

Despite many challenges, Canada's beef industry has shown great resiliency and continues to look for opportunities to grow in new and existing global markets.



“More fresh air, way more light, that's what the livestock need. We are really pleased with the gains.”

- Hans Steen, Stoneview Acres

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Beef Market Development Update

Ontario Corn Fed Beef was represented at the Restaurants Canada show in Toronto in May. This is the first in-person trade event in Canada since 2019.



Participation was better than anticipated, and customer traffic was high at the booth hosted by our newest brand partner, The Butcher Shoppe. Also, the Ontario Corn Fed Beef brand was featured along with Van Osch Farms Premium Ontario Beef. Van Osch features the OCFB Quality Assurance Program along with their certification under the Canadian Roundtable for Sustainable Beef as their significant point of differentiation in the marketplace.

Telling the OCFB Story on Your Smartphone

OCFB has launched a new QR code-enabled website that helps bring the farm to fork story to life right on your phone.

A consumer can scan the QR code and experience the farm to fork story of how Ontario families sustainably raise cattle and produce some of the highest quality beef in the world.

You can scan the QR code with your phone or visit www.ocfbeatstory.ca



FCC Rewards Certified Sustainable Operations

Farm Credit Canada has launched a customer incentive program to reward its customers who certify their operations to meet the requirements of the Canadian Roundtable for Sustainable Beef.

The FCC Sustainability Incentive Program will provide a payment to FCC customers who are CRSB Certified through CRSB's certification bodies, including Verified Beef Production Plus, Where Food Comes From and the Ontario Corn Fed Beef Quality Assurance Program.

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Founded in 1933, Vetoquinol is an independent, family-owned business. Our deep commitment to rural values and to science allows us to address the specific needs of producers and veterinarians alike, people with shared interests, working together to reach the same goal, responsibly.

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“Canadian producers are already expert stewards of the land and livestock, and the beef sector has been a leader in demonstrating their sustainable practices through the CRSB,” said Todd Klink, FCC’s vice-president of marketing. “We are pleased to work with the CRSB to recognize FCC customers who have already achieved their certification and to encourage additional producers to become certified.”

Learn more at fcc.ca/SustainabilityPrograms.

OCFB Shines Spotlight on OCFB QA Certified Producers



A new section on the ontariocornfedbeef.com website features Producer Profiles on certified OCFB producers. These profiles help to tell the on-farm story of Ontario Corn Fed Beef and how Ontario farming families sustainably raise cattle to produce consistently great-tasting beef with the highest levels of animal care. See the videos at <https://ontariocornfedbeef.com/producer-profiles/>

If you are interested in having your operation featured in a video, contact us at info@ontariocornfedbeef.com.

OCFB Continues Strong Growth In Japan

OCFB was on display once again at major food shows in Japan. OCFB and Ontario Heritage Angus Beef were on display at the Supermarket Trade Show and Foodex in Tokyo, and FoodStyle in Okinawa.

Both Ontario beef brands have been gaining a lot of attention in the market as retailers look to unique brands that offer consumers a high level of confidence in quality and safety.

Ontario beef exports to Japan increased another 20% over 2021 volumes and continue to show promise in the early stages of 2022.



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Managing Beef On Dairy Crosses



This photo from Dan Schaefer's presentation displays the ideal beef x Holstein crossbred steer.

The Ontario Corn Fed Beef Program and the Ontario Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs teamed up to present a webinar highlighting the rapidly growing production trend of beef-on-dairy crosses. Aired on March 24, the webinar aimed to explore the differences in management strategies between traditional beef cattle and these crosses.

The webinar noted that the move by dairy producers to breed their highest producing cows to sexed semen is gaining in popularity. Quebec is seemingly the most advanced in Canada so far in the production of calf numbers available with consistent, identifiable genetics. This beef-on-dairy management practice offers choices for the dairy producer. The top producers in the herd create a desirable heifer calf of superior genetic traits for the replacement heifer program. The remaining cows in the herd are then bred with beef sires, producing the beef-on-dairy crosses.

This production model will most certainly continue to evolve in the dairy industry. In addition, the resulting beef-on-dairy crosses will enter the feeder cattle and beef supply chain, thereby creating the need for further development in the proper production protocols.

As these dairy crosses are being placed on feed in numerous cattle feeding operations in Ontario, we see a distinct variation of quality between groups of these cattle, resulting from genetics, health, and feeding programs. There-

fore, we need to continue to identify the issues and implement the corrective actions to produce a consistently high-quality beef product for our consumers. Our goal, as the Ontario Corn Fed Beef Program, is to shed light on some of the changes that we see coming and to provide leadership to our producers in the production process, thus carrying forward our long-standing program goals of providing a consistent-quality animal while providing an excellent eating experience for our customers.

Tom Wright, OMAFRA Dairy Specialist, set the stage for the webinar by presenting a brief overview of the pace of change occurring in the dairy industry in Ontario. He explained that sexed semen and genomic testing provide enough replacement heifers from breeding only top cows. "Top cows mean different things to different farms, but using sexed semen is no longer a 50-50 chance of getting a heifer calf or a bull calf," said Wright. "You pretty much get a heifer calf. So, the question was, 'What do we do with breeding these other ones that we don't need replacement heifers from?' The answer for that is beef sires."

Wright showed some statistics to highlight the increase in breeding dairy heifers to beef. In 1996, Holstein-to-Holstein breeding was at 96 per cent. He said significant changes started in 2014, with the pace increasing rapidly where the percentage is now in the range of breeding 30 per cent to beef.

As a result, this percentage creates many potential beef animals in Eastern Canada. For example, Wright estimated Ontario's dairy cow herd at 318,000, with another 362,000 in Quebec. Using the rate of 30 per cent, this translates to 95,400 beef calves in Ontario and 108,870 in Quebec. "It could certainly go higher than 30 per cent," added Wright. "It will depend on where this market goes and how aggressive guys want to be on the dairy side."

According to Wright, a key challenge is the variability of calves that exists between the dairy farms. There are more than 3,000 dairy farms with different management styles and different early calf and health factors. There's also variability in the advice on sire selection. "On the opportunity side, dairy has a year-round supply of calves and has very good traceability," he said. "So, how can we leverage that traceability into a marketable perspective as well?"

The U.S. Experience

Dan Schaefer, Professor Emeritus of the University of Wisconsin, provided an overview of the trend in the U.S., noting several benefits and challenges associated with beef-on-dairy crosses. He started his presentation with a look at the production of Holstein steers. "The industry is well-acquainted with them; they know what to expect from the high-energy fed Holstein steer, whether it's calf-fed or whether it's a yearling-fed," said Schaefer. "It's a very well understood commodity."

On the positive side, Schaefer explained that Holstein steers provide consistency and predictability regarding genetics and yield characteristics. However, they have a lower dressing percentage than the native beef breed carcasses. Schaefer said this is due to the increased proportion of the gut, a reduced muscling score, less subcutaneous fat, increased liver size and an increased proportion of abdominal fat in Holsteins compared to native beef breeds.

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Moving onto the beef-on-dairy crossbred steers, he noted that the U.S. is focusing on bringing predictability and consistency to this production system. The goal for the first generation is to have an animal that will meet Certified Angus Beef or similar standards. In other words, it has to be more than a black calf. "You only have one generation to take that animal that is half-dairy and make it look like a high-quality, Angus-type animal."

The key characteristics include modest to higher marbling scores and superior muscling. "Now the Holstein already has a good marbling trait," added Schaefer. "So, we're looking for a beef sire that doesn't disrupt that. And, if anything, it could make it a little bit better."

As for muscling, they're looking for a sire that has some muscle and will transmit it. "Because heritability for that trait is quite high, we can accomplish that in one generation," he said.

In addition to the benefits, Schaefer also pointed out some challenges. These include bull selection and the ability to produce large, uniform sets of crossbred progenies. Colostrum feeding of the calves is also crucial to the dairy-crossbreed system. "To maximize calf value, coordination among the dairy herd, the calf-raiser, the feedlot and the packing plant is needed," said Schaefer, highlighting a need for communication between the sectors. "And I would say that as an industry, we need some beef cutting tests to be done to establish the cutting yield valuation of crossbreds."

Getting The Right Traits

Brad Gilchrist, Manager, Beef Marketing for Semex, offered the perspective from the genetics side of the industry. Noting that the beef-on-dairy trend is here to stay, the goal is to make the cross-calves profitable for both dairy and beef producers. He said this means striking the right balance for what the dairy industry needs while creating a product that generates value in the other segments of the beef industry.

For dairy producers, the main emphasis is on calving ease and fertility. "They want to get their cows pregnant, and they want to have them calving without any issues," said Gilchrist.

"We need to understand what is driving that feedlot's profitability and feed conversion rates, and health are top of mind. Both things I think can be drastically affected by genetics."

Gilchrist noted that his industry is looking closely at issues such as days on feed and targeted harvest weights, ensuring that the calves can reach the targets on the right amounts of forages. "With everyone being well aware of what commodity prices are today, this is something that is top of mind for us and getting the most amount of dollars out of these cattle," he said.

Echoing Schaefer's comments, Gilchrist added that building relationships between dairy producers, calf buyers and genetics companies is essential. "I think it's important that dairy producers and calf buyers are really transparent," he said. "From a dairy producer's standpoint, they need to understand what's important to that calf buyer. And from the calf buyer's perspective, they need to really understand how much extra it is taking for these dairy producers to produce the right kind of calf."

The webinar wrapped up with a panel featuring Ontario feedlot producers Bob Bechtel, Marvin Burkhart and Ontario Cattle Feeders' Association President Al Noorloos. Before the discussion, the webinar audience had the chance to see videos that were shot at the participants' farms.

Bechtel said the crosses on his farm come mostly from local dairies in the Kitchener area, where they were given a good amount of colostrum. The arriving cattle weigh approximately 300 pounds and are started on a ration consisting primarily of hay, with some grain. He noted the ration doesn't change until the calves reach 600 pounds. Blue tags are applied at birth to identify the sire.

Next up was Marvin Burkhart, who showed part of his operation near Wallenstein, where they feed 1,500 head of cattle, half of which are dairy crosses. Burkhart said the dairy crosses should go on feed at lighter weights than their native beef counterparts, perhaps at 700 to 800 pounds. "I think we have to be a little careful on how much we pay for them," he added. "You're not going to get quite the gain as a beef steer. The feed conversion isn't going to be quite there."

While Al Noorloos was on hand for the panel discussion, his son, Andrew, stood in for the video presentation. Andrew said they've been feeding the dairy crosses for the last three or four years at their family farm near Wyoming, Ont.

The arriving cattle weigh approximately 600 to 650 pounds, which he said makes a good transition to a TMR ration. While they've noticed some improvements in recent years, there is still room to grow. They see cattle with horns and calves with a high-bone presence.

During the panel discussion, Al said they've considered the dairy crosses as a way to lessen the reliance on bringing in Western calves and yearlings. While noting that there may be a benefit in the present market, given the cost of transportation and competing with Western feedlots for cattle, he echoed Marvin's words of caution. "We have to be careful about price on this just because there are some of these unknowns and variabilities yet," said Noorloos. "We have to be cautious on that approach."

For more about the producer experiences and to view the keynote presentations, we plan to post the videos and the webinar on the Ontario Corn Fed Beef YouTube channel.

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Markets: Feed Costs Hurting Fed Cattle Profitability

High grain prices and escalating input costs have overshadowed the stronger beef prices, particularly in the Ontario fed cattle market. Dallas Rodger, a market analyst at Canfax, describes Ontario as “the shining star” in the Canadian cattle market. “There have been a couple of weeks where Ontario prices have been the highest priced cattle in North America on the fed side,” he said. “For the better part of the year, (the prices) have been at a premium to the Alberta fed cattle market as well.”

When it comes to fed cattle production since January, the number is up four per cent in Western Canada, whereas Ontario's production is down slightly at two per cent. “In Western Canada, the packers have been able to keep a cushion, buying cattle pretty well one month in advance where the times in Eastern Canada have been a little tighter,” he added.

Cattle-on-feed numbers have been elevated in the West, which Rodger attributes to the high number of placements because of drought. As a result, there were many grass-yearlings that were placed early this past year. In addition, the fall calf run in Western Canada started earlier than normal.

According to the Beef Farmers of Ontario, prices for fed steers averaged \$191.17 for the week ending June 2, up \$35.99 from last year. Fed heifers averaged \$188.59, up \$37.91. The rail-grade market improved to an average of \$311.75 for steers, up \$51 from this time last year. The BFO weekly report noted that the last time steers averaged \$311.75 was the week ending September 3, 2015.

Feed prices, however, have soared higher as the war in Ukraine has raised concerns about the global grain supply. Before the Russian invasion, old crop corn prices in the Chatham-Kent area traded around \$7.47 per bushel at the market close on Feb. 3. During the start of the war, the prices rose to \$8.25 on Feb. 24. What's more, the prices hit \$9.71 (or approximately \$382 per tonne) on May 17. “Even though we're talking about new annual highs being put in our fed cattle market, not only for Alberta and Ontario, (but) it's just disappointing we're at that highest level since 2017, and yet feedlot losses continue to pile up,” said Rodger. “Since 2019, there's only been two or three months of the year that guys have been able to turn a positive margin.”

With inflation emerging as another significant issue in 2022, the beef demand side of the market will be watched closely. So far, consumers are still showing a willingness to pay more for beef. Meanwhile, exports continue to be strong. “For the first quarter of this year, we're looking at total Canadian

beef exports up 10 per cent,” noted Rodger. “And that's pretty impressive considering we don't have direct access to China. We lost that with our atypical BSE case.”

Last year, China was the third-largest export market for Canadian beef. The top two markets, the U.S. and Japan, account for slightly more than 80 per cent of the exports.

Besides commodity and input prices, the value of the Canadian dollar will also be a significant factor to watch. Recently, the Loonie has been trading in a range of 77 to 80 cents-U.S. Rodger expects much the same in the short term. “We keep hearing talk of more interest rate hikes coming,” said Rodger. “We could see a push on the dollar. (But) I would say it's in a solid trading range; I don't see it breaking to the upside in a huge way.”

The speculation about the higher interest rates was confirmed on June 1 when the Bank of Canada raised its benchmark rate by a half a percentage point to 1.5 per cent. In a statement, the Central Bank indicated that more increases will be needed as inflation is expected to move higher in the near term.



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Register Now For The 2022 Feedlot Management School

Beef Farmers of Ontario and the Ontario Cattle Feeders' Association are excited to be hosting our first, in-person Feedlot Management School, coming this June!

A great opportunity to tour four feedlots in Southwestern Ontario, hear from industry speakers, as well as network with producers from across the province.

To register and find out more information, please visit the Beef Farmers of Ontario website at:

<https://www.ontariobeef.com/communications/news/register-now-for-the-feedlot-management-school>

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