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An Ontario Cattle Feeders' Publication



Spring 2023 Edition



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CONVENTION HIGHLIGHTS



The 25th anniversary edition of the Beef Industry Convention was a huge success. The return of the in-person event produced many highlights, including key industry updates and opportunities for networking and fellowship. Details inside.

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Celebrating 25 Years Of The OCFA



Phil George (left), Director of Procurement, Beef, Pork, Lamb and Veal, for Loblaw Companies Limited, congratulates Jim Clark, Executive Director of the Ontario Cattle Feeders' Association, on the 25th Anniversary of the OCFA at the Beef Industry Convention.

When looking back at the beginning of the Ontario Cattle Feeders' Association, Executive Director Jim Clark reminisced that some thought there wouldn't be enough glue to hold it all together. But, as he noted in his presentation to the 25th Anniversary edition of the Beef Industry Convention, the group stuck together by their original commitment to improve and maintain a more competitive and viable beef industry in Ontario.

"It has been a great ride for me to be a part of it and see how far things have progressed," said Clark. "I'm happy to say we've got a great working relationship with the Beef Farmers of Ontario. We've come to the position now that it's all about the betterment of this industry; it's all about the

betterment of the eastern Canadian cattle industry. We have so many opportunities here, and it's extremely important."

As for the feedlot sector, Clark is optimistic about the opportunities for growth. Given the interest in sustainable practices, he noted that the original blueprint for Ontario Corn Fed Beef places the brand in a good position. "If you look at it, we've been doing it for over 24 years with our Quality Assurance and the various parts that you do as operators on the farm," he said.

The number of cattle going through the program demonstrates the growth the brand has experienced, especially over the last decade. In 2011, the Ontario Corn Fed Beef program sourced 148,066 head of cattle. The number grew to 330,577 in 2021. The number dropped only slightly last year to 323,417. "That's all because of the people; you as the producers and the 512 family farms that we have on the program that are part of the process, and that's helping to drive the process more and more," he said.

Besides developing relationships with producers, building partnerships throughout the value chain has also been a key to success. In addition to working with packers, retailers and food service companies, attention is also paid to consumers. "You get more input from dealing directly with that consumer who's walking into a grocery store and buying your products, and that's one area we really focus on," said Clark. "And it comes down to branding and customer retention."

But he added that maintaining beef sales is an uphill battle in the current economy. While retail beef prices are trending slightly lower and more features are being offered, Clark noted that beef is still a high-priced commodity.



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“Consumers have a strong desire to eat beef,” he said. “People love beef, but at the end of the day, their pocketbook is voting for something else, and most times, they’re voting for chicken. That’s what makes it so important that we stay with our retail partners and stay focused in the consumer’s mind for that great value and a great steak.”

Value and a great eating experience are only parts of the bigger picture. Clark said it’s vital that the Ontario Corn Fed Beef story is also built on delivering a consistently high-quality product that involves social responsibility. In addition, it needs to be credible and verifiable. “That’s the one thing we have when we talk to consumers: We know the producers, the families and the processes that are in place on those farms,” said Clark, adding the processes are verified through to the retailer. “More and more the consumers want that information on production systems and processes. They might not always be willing to pay for that, but I think

it’s a given that they want to know the processes are in place for the products they’re buying, and that comes down to your brand equity.”

The concept of brand equity means that a product cannot be displaced from another jurisdiction or brand. Therefore, the goal of Ontario Corn Fed Beef and the Ontario Beef Market Development Program is to build brands focused on Ontario producers that others cannot substitute. Brand equity becomes more crucial in the face of large volumes of beef that are imported into the province. “When you look at other countries, they look at Canada as a great place to export beef into,” said Clark. “The big part is all those inroads lead to Eastern Canada.”

The brand story and the Quality Assurance go beyond the regular beef cuts. The program also focuses on other end-users, including hides. Clark said the association is working with Banks Brothers, a large hide processor, to meet its customers’ needs. Like food consumers, peo-

ple purchasing leather products want to know more about the process. “They want to understand more about the transparency and the environmental impacts and all those parts that go along that impact their purchasing decisions,” said Clark. “We’re working very closely through Ontario Corn Fed Beef, and it goes right back to our Quality Assurance. You have to be able to back up the story that’s going along with it.”

Looking ahead to 2023 and beyond, Clark reminded the audience that animal protein becomes a larger part of people’s diets as affluence grows in other countries. He repeated his earlier comments that the Ontario beef industry is well-positioned to share in the growth and the opportunities. “We can’t lose our focus and our drive and our ability to meet the challenges and reap the rewards,” said Clark. “The next ten years, I believe, Ontario is going to be the place to feed cattle. We just need to keep doing what we’re doing and moving forward.”

Quality, Value And Local Matter To Consumers

The Ontario Corn Fed Beef program helps Canada’s leading retailer meet its commitment to what it calls ESG - environment, social and governance practices. Phil George, the Director of Procurement, Beef, Pork, Lamb and Veal for Loblaw Companies Limited, told the Beef Industry Convention that ESG is part of the company’s difference. “Our purpose is to help Canadians live life well and, in doing so, meeting the needs of our consumers today while preparing for challenges of the future,” said George.

The Corn Fed Beef program has enjoyed a long partnership with Loblaw’s, which has been critical to the brand’s success. For Loblaw’s, OCFB is a good fit for the governance pillar.

“Customers expect our products to be safe and responsibly sourced,” said George. “We stay true to our values all the way through our supply chain. We promote safe and sustainable products and support Canadian suppliers.”

He noted that offering a fresh beef program

that shows value to consumers while being sourced from Canada satisfies the two most important attributes consumers look for when purchasing beef. On a list of several attributes, the competitive price of beef was at the top at 89 per cent. Beef sourced from Canada was at 78 per cent. Locally sourced is also moving up the attributes list, coming in at 65 per cent. “Quality and value are key, but local also matters,” added George.

While the challenging times of the pandemic are well-documented, George pointed out a few headwinds for 2023. These include cost challenges due to the influx of U.S. and imported beef, upward cost pressure of feed costs and reduction of herds, and fluctuating demand due to promotional activity. “Our demand is by no means consistent,” he said. “Rising inflation, interest rates, a war, general uncertainty in the future, labour, and logistics are a few of the headwinds we are going to be faced with this year and beyond.”

At the meat counter, shoppers are shifting to poultry and cheaper proteins due to high inflation. Grinds remain strong and are a core

item of customers’ baskets. “We need to put some higher focus on the end cuts that are more economical for feeding consumers and offer the best value we can for consumers,” said George.

As for the Ontario Corn Fed Beef program, Loblaw’s will continue to promote the products in the store flyers. Local products from local producers have been the key marketing message with in-store point-of-sale promotions. “We need to create it with our messaging and build upon the long-standing relationship,” said George, adding that he hopes to see the return of the “Pride of Ontario” truck and mobile kitchen this year. “That’s a great opportunity to bring the communities into the local stores and meet the local producers. It allows in-store demos and brings to light the advantages of Ontario Corn Fed.”

Quality Assurance Remains The Cornerstone Of OCFB Marketing



John Baker

Strong global demand and adding value through quality assurance will be vital if the Ontario Corn Fed Beef program is to continue to grow in the future. John Baker, Director of Brand Management and Business Development for the Ontario Cattle Feeders' Association and Ontario Corn Fed Beef, discussed the brand's evolution during his presentation at the annual Beef Industry Convention. Baker remarked that it's been exciting to see the growth of OCFB over the years. While sustainability has been a buzzword of late, it has been part of the OCFB story from the beginning. Since 2014, the marketing plans have brought more on-farm aspects, such as environmental stewardship, to the forefront. These practices also contribute to the uniqueness of the OCFB brand.

"We have a specific group of people that do a specific set of things that have specific outcomes that point to industry-leading objectives," said Baker, adding that animal health and welfare are just as important as environmental issues to consumers. "It's the main part of the OCFB program. This is something we've already been doing for over 20 years. So, we're going to continue to talk more about that."

According to Baker, discussions around sustainability will go beyond the practices within the feedlot sector. The future opportunities will involve marketing OCFB in the context of the agricultural value chain. "There's a real opportunity to bring in a much bigger perspective and yet something that is unique to Ontario and communicated more directly to groups of farmers that are doing specific things that have specific advantages and specific outcomes. Now we can talk about crop production."

The global marketplace

While the impact of COVID-19 has challenged the marketing efforts in export markets, Baker believes that increasing global demand translates into more opportunities for OCFB. Japan remains the highest-priority export market and represents the largest opportunity as the brand continues to grow. With the easing of COVID-related restrictions, key trade shows resumed in Asia. "We're starting to see some real opportunities to get back into those markets," said Baker, adding that incoming trade missions from export markets to Ontario are also set to resume in 2023. "I can tell you that it's the single, most impactful thing that we can do is to bring them to your farm and show them what you do on a daily basis. It makes them part of the story. And they take that and tell their customers that."

To put the increases in beef volume to Japan into perspective, the volume from 2020 to 2022 equates to approximately 200,000 head of Ontario cattle. "That works out to be about 1,500 cattle per week that are increased demand because of our efforts in Japan," noted Baker. "That's the power of the market and, again, that cannot be substituted by any other product."

The Middle East represents another strong market in which Ontario's high-quality grain-fed beef is unique. Baker noted the region, including Saudi Arabia, is shifting more towards tourism-based economies, which means there are even more opportunities for growth in the hotel and restaurant businesses. "We've been fortunate that we've spent some time working very closely with our packer partners to develop some really strong distributor partnerships both in Saudi Arabia and through the United Arab Emirates," he said. "We've also started developing new relationships in Kuwait, Bahrain and Qatar."

For Ontario's beef producers, the two markets help to demonstrate the marketing strategy's objective to deliver a clear and tangible return on the current check-off investment. Sales to Japan and Saudi Arabia alone have increased by \$64 million. With an investment of \$250,000, the return works out to \$256 for every dollar of check-off invested. "And that's for beef sourced from Ontario cattle," said Baker. "Again, that (beef) cannot be substituted. In fact, those cattle have to be Ontario Corn Fed Beef cattle because that's the only way to verify that those cattle came from Ontario."



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High Rate Of U.S. Heifer Slaughter Poses Big Challenge For Beef Markets

Of all the factors that can affect the beef markets, a U.S. industry market analyst is closely watching the number of cows and heifers slaughtered south of the border.

Dr. Derrell Peel, Professor of Agribusiness and Extension Livestock Marketing Specialist at Oklahoma State University, presented a wide-ranging outlook for the beef and cattle markets during his keynote presentation to the Beef Industry Convention on Jan. 12.

For Peel, the cow/heifer slaughter is the single most important statistic in the U.S. industry and will be a telling number in the future. He noted that 51.4 per cent of all the cattle slaughtered in the U.S. last year were female. It's a rare occurrence that hasn't happened since 1986. "It's only happened nine times, and eight of those were between 1975 and 1986," added Peel. "And that was when our peak numbers had dropped dramatically from where they were a decade and a half or so."

The higher female slaughter number means rebuilding the U.S. cattle herd will take time. Moreover, the ongoing drought in key cattle regions in the U.S. also poses a challenge to rebuilding the numbers. "I think it's going to be a slower process this time than the last time in

that 2014 to 2019 expansion in the U.S.," said Peel, adding that over 13 per cent of the U.S. cow herd was culled last year.

While beef production was at a record high in 2022, it resulted from depleting the cattle inventory in the U.S. "That's not sustainable," he said. "You can't do that forever. And when it stops, it goes the other way."

As expected, the U.S. Department of Agriculture noted a lower beef cow herd in its livestock estimates report on January 31. According to the data, the beef cow herd is estimated at 28.9 million head, the lowest in 61 years.

The cumulative effect of drought

More than two years of drought in the U.S. has significantly impacted the cattle industry. Peel said that the drought accelerated the liquidation of the herd during that time. Furthermore, the ongoing dry conditions have a cumulative effect. Peel noted that the drought has exhausted hay supplies, which means U.S. producers have had to liquidate cows. "Our forage conditions are just in pretty dire conditions, particularly in a majority of where the biggest concentrations of beef cattle are," he said. "Pretty much all the hay is relatively tapped out, and that's one of

the issues, particularly after two-plus consecutive years."

While corn prices are high, the drought is not the sole reason. Peel said it's more of a demand issue than a supply-side issue because export demand and demand for corn, in general, are supporting the current price levels. The impact, though, results in a higher average cost of gain for feedlots. For example, feedlots in Kansas saw the number increase to approximately \$1.40 for steers from 80 cents per pound. "I don't see it changing," said Peel. "At least not before the end of this crop year. So, not before this fall's harvest. If we have a good crop, we may see some improvement by the end of the year."

As a result of the lower cattle numbers, Peel predicted that prices would continue to trend upward, with a spike occurring when U.S. producers start to rebuild the herd. It could happen this year, but he said it's more likely to occur in 2024. "Cattle prices will be higher in 2023," added Peel. "At some point, they're going to be a lot higher for some period of time. The cow-calf guys are going to be in the driver's seat because the market needs cattle."

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The Honourable Lisa Thompson, Ontario Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs, presented a certificate to commemorate the 25th anniversary of the Ontario Cattle Feeders' Association during the banquet at the Beef Industry Convention. Al Noorloos, President of OCFA and Ontario Corn Fed Beef, accepted the award on behalf of the organization.

To our 25th Annual Beef Industry Convention Participants:

We would like to take this time to thank you for your very generous and ongoing support of our organization moving forward into the future. We were pleased to bring back an in-person event after pausing for the pandemic, and we were delighted by the large turnout.

As you well know, our Annual Beef Industry Convention has been a key part in the delivery of messaging related to partnerships and change in an industry notoriously known for being independent. Our goal has been to provide events that allow for thought outside the normal box. And as well, we firmly believe that this get-together provides a catalyst for sharing thoughts and, most of all, fellowship amongst like-minded individuals. The venue also plays a major role in bringing all of the various partners and sectors under one roof.

Once again, we appreciate your commitment to our organization and this annual event. Whether it is through a sponsorship; participation as an exhibitor; donation of auction items, or through a purchase at the fundraising auction, we could not continue to deliver the top-quality speakers and agendas that would be key to the future success of our industry as a whole.

Once again, "Thank you," and we look forward to working with you throughout 2023 as we work together on our mission to "improve and maintain a more viable beef industry in Ontario."

Best regards,

Wendy Clements
Administrator

Jim Clark
Executive Director



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Grain Market Outlook For 2023



Steve Kell

Market analyst Steve Kell lists South American weather, North American planting intentions and the war in Ukraine as the key grain market drivers in 2023. In addition, Kell also has his eye on the impact of a potentially large winter wheat crop on the Ontario feed market.

Before delving into the key market drivers, Kell said the drought in the U.S. helped set the stage for today's corn prices. In the last crop report from the United States Department of Agriculture before the convention, the agency reduced its estimate for the crop to 13.7 billion bushels. "This is the third smallest corn crop in the last 10 years and quite a bit smaller than average," he said, adding that corn prices could be on the rise this year. "Expect values for this year's corn to be five to eight and, conceivably, as much as ten per cent higher than last year."

During the winter months, traders focus on South America's crop development. As Kell was giving his presentation, the markets were focused on the drought in Argentina. The dry weather has boosted the prices, but he noted there is the potential for the prices to drop if the area receives rain and the soybean and corn crops grow bigger.

According to Kell, North American oilseed farmers were saved by the La Nina weather pattern, which resulted in the rain in Australia and drought in South America. "In spite of a large record acreage in South America, they did not have that big of a crop because of La Nina," he said. "Last year, the highest price was the ninth of February. If we don't get rain in South America over the next two to three weeks, prices will continue to go up because the amount that we're behind on exports is way less than what they will be behind in yields."

As for planting intentions, Kell is expecting U.S. and Canadian farmers to plant more soybeans this year. In Ontario, the large winter wheat acreage planted last fall suggests the corn acres will decrease. "We planted an extra 600,000 acres of winter wheat; there needs to be 600,000 acres less of something else," he said.

Potential for large Ontario wheat crop

Wet conditions during the previous year limited Ontario's winter wheat acreage to approximately 535,000 acres. Industry estimates for the 2023 crop range between 1.1 and 1.3 million acres. Kell said that means more than 3 million tonnes of wheat could be harvested, based on a relatively ordinary yield of 90 bushels per acre. "It's only been twice in history that Ontario has grown more than 2.5 million tonnes of winter wheat," added Kell.

According to Kell's estimates, the flour mills in eastern Canada use approximately 650,000 tonnes of wheat. The rest would have to go to exports or the feed market. What's more, the prices of corn and soft red winter wheat become similar in August and September when the trade is trying to move wheat through the pipeline and empty the bins for the next crop.

"For this coming year, I would suggest it's going to start a lot earlier, and it's going to last a lot longer," said Kell. "If any of you have extra corn that you sell, I would suggest you want to have your sales strategy for corn figured out way before wheat harvest starts because, at that point, we're going to overwhelm the feed pipeline with things they can use other than corn."

The Russian invasion of Ukraine is another significant driver in the grain markets. Kell said it triggered exceptional volatility in commodity prices, resulting in record highs last spring and summer. Russia is the third-largest wheat-producing country in the world, while Ukraine ranks seventh. The two countries represent a quarter of the world's exports. As a result, the markets experienced several swings as traders monitored the potential for exports from the Black Sea Region.

"Back in October, the Russians made an announcement they were going to stop exporting grain, and wheat and corn prices went way up for a few days. Then they dropped," said Kell, citing one example of the price swings.

Kell believes the extreme volatility in the corn and wheat markets experienced a year ago is behind us. However, he notes that there will still be a few rallies when the conflict escalates or grain shipments are hampered. "Most of what we're going to see in terms of its impact on pricing will be those days where the futures traders chase the headline for a little while," added Kell.

"It's got some potential to create pops in the market if you're looking for an individual opportunity to do some pricing. But I don't think it has the horsepower to push to a whole new pricing plateau."



Beef Farmers Of Ontario Update



Jack Chaffe

The Ontario Cattle Feeders' Association continues to enjoy a strong partnership with the Beef Farmers of Ontario. The BFO is also a loyal supporter of the Ontario Corn Fed Beef program. The two organizations formed a joint marketing committee in 2019 to dedicate greater resources to the market development of Ontario beef. In addition to market development, the BFO has worked with OCFA and represented feedlot producers in many ways. Jack Chaffe, President of BFO and Vice President of OCFA, highlighted the BFO's activities during his presentation to the Beef Industry Convention.

Regarding government relations at the provincial level, the BFO continues to advocate for an increase in Ontario's Risk Management Program (RMP). In 2019-20, the government added \$50 million to the program to bring it to the current \$150 million. However, several farm groups, including BFO, say another \$100 million is required to meet the needs of farmers participating in the program.

To demonstrate the importance of the RMP to farmers, the Ontario Agriculture Sustainability Coalition, which includes BFO, commissioned a Return-on-Investment (ROI) study. Chaffe said every dollar spent on RMP returns between two dollars to \$3.60. Differences between regions and sectors contributed to the spread in ROI. "But it was a good tool to do this study, and we can take it back to the government and hopefully get our \$100 million ask," he said.

The past year saw a return of the BFO's annual Queens Park barbecue in September. The event allows the BFO to connect with many govern-

ment ministers and MPPs. Although he arrived late from another meeting, Premier Doug Ford met later with Chaffe and BFO Executive Director Richard Horne. "I give him credit for meeting with us," he said of the hour-long meeting. "We had a good discussion on RMP, the PAWS program (Provincial Animal Welfare Services Act), and we touched on South Korea's segregation of cattle going into the U.S."

Unlike the U.S., Canada's trade agreement with South Korea stops beef exports from Canada if another BSE case is found in Canada. The Canadian Cattle Association (CCA) says this means that processing plants in the U.S. that would otherwise increase demand for Canadian cattle are hesitant and may avoid purchasing cattle because of segregation.

Another key issue at the federal level is the work to build a foot-and-mouth vaccine bank in Canada. Should an outbreak occur in Canada, the BFO and CCA want to have vaccines on hand. "Those talks are going well," said Chaffe. "We're hoping to hear something positive in the near future."

Calling it a big victory, Chaffe highlighted the

move to exempt ground beef and pork from the requirement of having a front-of-package warning label. Such a proposal to have warning labels on the front of packages would have sent the wrong signals, particularly to the export markets.

Chaffe was pleased to see that the "Don't Label My Beef" campaign had a successful outcome. "It could have gone the other way when you try to get the public involved in sending letters to MPs," he said. "But they really grasped what was going on and didn't want to be told what to eat, and we had a positive response."

On the consumer engagement side, the BFO saw success in trying new, low-cost advertisements on YouTube and podcasts. For example, in a campaign called "Great Taste is Closer Than You Think," short, pop-up ads on YouTube generated over 9 million impressions. It turned out to be a successful addition to the BFO's consumer engagement activities. "We're trying to engage the people in urban centres where the population is dense," said Chaffe. "We want to get into those markets and sell Ontario beef, and we're doing it through these programs."



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Beefing Up Certified Sustainable Production



Jeffrey Fitzpatrick-Stilwell

The Canadian Roundtable for Sustainable Beef (CRSB) program is a hit with consumers to the extent that demand for the product has outstripped the supply. That was one of the key messages from Jeffrey Fitzpatrick-Stilwell, the Beef Up Sustainability Program Lead for Cargill, during his presentation to the Beef Industry Convention.

The CRSB has created the Certified Sustainable Beef Framework, called CRSB Certified. It's a voluntary tool that enables producers and processors to demonstrate sustainability in their operations. Through third-party audited certification, indicators of sustainability are verified against outcome-based standards. In addition, the system tracks cattle and beef at every stage of the supply chain, enables sustainable sourcing and delivers credible, science-based claims about how beef is raised in Canada, represented by the CRSB Certified logo.

Fitzpatrick-Stilwell said a significant part of the framework is recognizing farmers' good work.

Moreover, it is a way to verify the protocols and procedures, which resonates stronger with younger consumers seeking sustainable products. "We're trying to make sure to give those generations the proof points, so it will make them continue to want to buy it and feel positive about it," he noted, adding that the worst thing that could happen is to make eating beef seem like a guilty pleasure. "We want people to understand that the best thing that you can do for climate change today is to eat Canadian beef."

The CRSB has been pleased with the demand for the program so far, and the purchasers want more. The challenge now is to meet the increased demand. "It is hard for them to make plans about making commitments to a percentage or volume in a time frame," said Fitzpatrick-Stilwell. "We keep saying to them we can't tell you exactly how quickly we're going to be able to add volume in this program."

As the program evolves, he said there is a need to ensure that the value goes back through the value chain to include the cow-calf producers. "It's a critical segment, as we all know," said Fitzpatrick-Stilwell. "We want to make sure that we're focused on the feedlots but not forgetting the cow-calf too and helping link that chain together."

They're also looking at ways to recognize the value of the end-users in the chain, the one that deals directly with consumers. Certification is going to be a significant component. Fitzpatrick-Stilwell explained that certification provides the end-users with a robust and vigorous program that they can use to communicate with their customers. "It's one of the most powerful tools we can give them," he said.

Fitzpatrick-Stilwell believes the next stage for CRSB is to show the end-users that the beef industry can continue to grow the program. The goal is to create something more than a niche product that only certain people can have. "The whole concept of this thing is to recognize that all of the Canadian production is sustainable," he said. "Canada produces the safest, most sustainable, high-quality beef in the world, and this is a way to recognize the whole value chain, not specific actors in it. But we need those volumes to keep going up."

He added that he has spent a lot of time working in the U.S. in his new role with Cargill and is reminded daily of the advantages of the Canadian beef industry, adding the CRSB is ahead of other roundtables in the world.

Besides the CRSB program, Fitzpatrick-Stilwell briefly discussed Cargill's latest program on climate change, called Beef Up Sustainability. He's leading the engagement of Cargill's customers, farmers and other industry stakeholders to develop strategies and projects aimed at reducing greenhouse gas intensity by 30 percent by 2030. "It's recognizing that cattle are a huge solution to climate change," he said. "We want to use these programs to help producers be more profitable by being more efficient, and all of those things will lead to greenhouse gas savings for us."



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Improving Beef On Dairy Crosses With Data



Brad Gilchrist

When Brad Gilchrist, Semex Global Beef Marketing Manager, thinks about great beef, he considers all the decisions that occurred through the value chain before the product reached the consumer's plate.

Gilchrist, a panellist during our webinar on beef-on-dairy crosses last year, shared more of his insight on the trend at the Beef Industry Convention. A key message is that data-based decisions will help move the trend forward.

In recent years, the move by dairy producers to breed their highest-producing cows to sexed semen is gaining in popularity. The beef-on-dairy management practice offers choices for the dairy producer. The top producers in the herd create a desirable heifer calf with superior

genetic traits for the replacement heifer program. The remaining cows are then bred with beef sires, producing beef-on-dairy crosses. These crosses are touted as a way to provide more animals for the feedlot sector to help feed a growing population.

"What we were able to do with genomic testing was identify which of those cows truly are making us a lot of money," said Gilchrist explaining the rationale from the dairy perspective. "We're able to identify which calf in our herd is on the top side of the spectrum and which is on the bottom side. It only makes sense that we want the replacements coming out of our better cows."

As the process moved along, he said the dairy industry went through a stage of producing a surplus of heifer calves. Then, to enhance the value of the heifers in the bottom half of the herd, the industry developed the strategy to breed them with beef cattle.

For Gilchrist, the goal is to produce a calf that will excel all through the chain and meet customers' needs. It's about taking what used to be a by-product for the dairy industry and making it a core product. "We need to make sure that we're using the data to measure our success, measure the improvements we've made, he said. "Sure, we're not going to be successful every time, but if we can't measure it, we're not going to know if we're going forward or backwards."

Key steps include changing the mindset of dairy producers to produce beef calves with the same selection pressure as what's placed on replace-

ment dairy females. Getting there includes understanding the needs of feeders, processors and consumers.

"Our beef input costs are going up. We've seen commodity prices over the last few years drastically increase; labour is hard to get," said Gilchrist of the challenges of the feedlot sector. "The sooner we can get cattle off feed and onto a hook, the more profitable all of us are going to be."

When discussing feed efficiency, he said it's important to look at dry matter intake and average daily gain together. "We need to make sure we have cattle eating less and gaining more at the same time," said Gilchrist. "We've got a demand to feed people, a demand to feed cattle, and in order for us to fill that demand, we need to be able to supply it. One way is to look at the dairy industry and the ability to carry a calf for us."

The data being used by the industry could be used to demonstrate other benefits to customers and consumers. For example, traceability, from birth to the hook, is possible in the dairy industry.

He believes the beef-on-dairy crosses are here to stay, but more data will be required to assess crucial attributes such as cuttability, feed efficiency and health. "They're here for us to be able to create a product that is in demand and a product that has a high quality to it," added Gilchrist. "But we've got to make sure we're putting the right genetics into the right cows to be able to get you guys the right calves."

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Understanding Millennials And Other Generations In The Workplace



Alicia Rainwater

With as many as five generations working together on some farms, agriculture is no stranger to the dynamics and tensions between the age groups. As a result, bridging the generational divides can prove to be challenging.

For insight into understanding the dynamics of multiple generations, the Ontario Cattle Feeders' Association invited Alicia Rainwater, a Certified Keynote Speaker at the Center for Generational Kinetics (CGK), to share her expertise at the Beef Industry Convention.

"We look at how generations behave, both at work and in the marketplace," explained Rainwater. "We're on a mission to separate generational myths from truths, and we do that with data."

She defines a generation as a geographically linked population segment that has experienced similar cultural and social events at roughly the same point in their maturation. Understanding the generations builds trust, connection and influence with older or younger people.

According to Rainwater, parenting and technology are the two biggest influences shaping a generation. Concerning the latter, their research has found that each of us has a different relationship with technology that is primarily

based on our age. In addition, she noted that your experience with technology shapes your expectations for how you operate in the workplace, including how you communicate and solve problems.

The youngest generation in the workforce is known as Gen Z, including people born between 1996 and 2012. They've been shaped by the recession of 2008-09 and the COVID-19 pandemic. Rainwater said these two major disruptions profoundly impacted many of their choices and behaviours, particularly about money. "They're looking for employers that can provide them with stability," she said. "They're asking about benefits and they're also asking about flexible schedules, which is tricky in this room."

The next group is the Millennials, representing the largest segment of today's workforce. Rainwater explained that the Millennials are two generations in one. The first, known as "Mega-Millennials," is following a similar path as the older generations. They received an education or training, showed up for work and started paying bills. The second group, known as "Mellennials," is smaller but gets more attention for their "entitlement behaviour."

Next on the list is Gen X, born between 1965 and 1976. This group came of age when two parents were entering the workforce more than ever. "You're the first generation of latchkey kids or a generation that really had to learn young how to become independent," said Rainwater.

She added that Gen X is "the skeptical generation." They want to make sure something is verifiable and trustworthy, which makes them good leaders. She said that their research revealed many in this group believed they only had one or two key moves left in their career. "We should really be thinking more about how we retain this generation because it's a key leadership generation that we have to be thinking a lot about."

The fourth group is the Baby Boomers, born between 1946 and 1964. They didn't retire as quickly as first thought, which has implications for succession planning. "It's hard to let some-

thing go that they've poured their hearts into something for long," she said. "We have to keep focusing on this generation as well; what are they going to be doing next, and how are they going to work with the younger generation?"

The fifth generation, the Traditionalists, was born before 1946. The oldest generation that's in the workforce was shaped by world conflict and the Great Depression.

Rainwater concluded her presentation by giving three strategies for working with the generations. The first is to understand the younger generations' way of thinking and learning. They're not linear thinkers, which means they've been conditioned to skip steps. "They're actually outcome-oriented thinkers and very visual learners and thinkers," she said.

She suggested explaining the last step or end goal first and then going back to the earlier steps of a task.

The second strategy is empowering younger generations and giving them more responsibility. She suggested giving them a "stretch project," which has a beginning, middle and end. "It's supportive in that you are trusting them to follow this through and supporting them as needed along the way."

The project must be realistic, so they believe they can accomplish it. However, it should also be challenging so they feel empowered to create a solution that might not seem readily available.

The final strategy might be the most important – providing ongoing, quick-hit feedback. This concept might be more challenging to grasp for some. "For older generations, if the boss wanted to talk to you, you have done something wrong," said Rainwater. "For the younger, if a person in authority is not talking to you, then something is wrong; something is amiss."

She said that feedback could be a quick text message or email, adding that frequent feedback is more important to the two younger generations. It's about guiding people along and showing them how they can improve.

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