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An Ontario Cattle Feeders' Publication



Spring 2025 Edition



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2025 CONVENTION HIGHLIGHTS



The 27th annual Beef Industry Convention attracted another big crowd to London in January. In this edition, we cover some of the highlights: Evolving OCFB marketing, Canada Beef's plans for promoting beef in a changing environment and empowering beef producers for succession planning success.

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STRENGTH THROUGH PARTNERSHIPS



Jim Clark, Executive Director

Drawing parallels between the cattle business and a rollercoaster, Jim Clark told the 27th annual Beef Industry Convention that he doesn't want the ride to stop and is ready to keep going. However, the Executive Director of the Ontario Cattle Feeders' Association and the Ontario Corn Fed Beef Program emphasized that partnerships, innovation and resilience are needed for a successful journey in the future.

Clark said that a significant part of the job has been building the network of approximately 500 family farms working under the Ontario Corn Fed Beef brand. Recalling the words of one of the founding members, Doug Kaufman, he said it's about individual producers and collaboration and creating change as a cohesive group in the industry. "It just takes a vision and a desire in everybody's heart to make it happen," Clark added. "What I've learned the most is the fact that you gain strength through the partnerships. It's about being proactive and not reactive."

On innovation, Clark highlighted advancements in cattle breeding and the growth of beef-on-dairy. He believes the revolution in genetics has paved the way for targeted breeding. "Today's cattle are not only more productive in the feedlots but as we heard from a (conference) speaker last year, there's going to be many more changes when it comes to breeding and all those different parts that add to the quality of the carcass, and that landscape is changing fast," he said.

What's more, the growth of beef-on-dairy crossbreeds is particularly significant, with the presence of 780,000 dairy cows between Ontario and Quebec. Clark said that as the

practice grows, it will reshape the feeding cycles, helping to produce calves 52 weeks of the year. "We'll maximize our feeding operations while producing a very consistent product due to the genetic pool within (the dairy) sector."

Clark also reflected on the focus and the evolution of sustainable practices in the industry. Improved animal welfare and care practices have underscored producers' commitment to creating a safe environment for both cattle and handlers. "By focusing on what's best for both the cattle and how to handle them, we've improved husbandry practices, prioritized veterinary care, and we've gained a deeper understanding of animal behaviours," he said. "I would challenge anyone who doesn't agree that cattle production and cattle handling hasn't changed for the better."

The sustainable practices also fit well with the vital need for the industry to tell its story in a credible and verifiable way among a myriad of false narratives regarding livestock production. In the face of adversity, Clark said the industry has responded positively and is constantly changing its environmental footprint. Efforts have been made in several aspects, including feed innovations, manure management and energy use. "Beef producers continue to shine while minimizing and qualifying the sustainability outcomes on their farms," he added. "New opportunities like carbon markets may open the door for even more investments in sustainable farming practices."

However, Clark quickly added that producers need to share and be part of the wealth as the financial viability of producers and processors is often overlooked when it comes to sustainability and working to provide societal benefits. "The feedlot sector and the processing sector cannot bear all the costs," he said. "Corporations and consumers alike need to recognize the changes for the so-called betterment and overall greater good. (These) need to be reflected up and down the value chain by rewarding those who continue to make changes and improvements."

Concerning marketing, Clark noted that the success of the Canadian beef industry hinges on its ability to connect with consumers and earn their trust. "Consumers want to know more



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about the beef products that they consume and serve their families, ranging from knowing where the food comes from and the production standards,” he said. “We see this process is ongoing while delivering fact-based messages around feed, animal safety and the nutritional aspects of beef. We need to develop and implement better business models that include the packer, processor and feeder to deliver value across the board.”

Clark believes the Ontario beef industry is well-equipped to thrive as the market continues to grow, especially with an increase in diverse consumer demands. Citing the increasing Muslim population in Canada, he noted that Ontario Corn Fed Beef was one of the first programs to receive Halal certification. But like the roller coaster ride he mentioned at the beginning, there will be highs and lows. For Clark, it comes

down to resilience and adapting to change. “What sets us apart is not the absence of these difficulties, but how we respond to it,” he said. “This is where resilience comes into play. Resilience is the ability to bounce back from these setbacks, adapt to the change and keep going in the face of adversity.”

Looking ahead, Clark believes the next 26 years will be even more transformative in the beef industry. As the industry rises to the calls to improve production, productivity and efficiency, Clark urged the attendees to remain committed to delivering what the consumer wants. “We need to make sure our industry can remain resilient in the face of new challenges,” said Clark. “And when opportunity knocks, open the door.”



Jim Clark and Brent Cavell of the Ontario Cattle Feeders’ Association and the Ontario Corn Fed Beef Program presented gifts to producers Sarah Alton and Stephen Dippel. We thank Sarah and Stephen for taking part in our News Feed Live webinar on “Flooring & Foot Health.” Produced in collaboration with the Ontario Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Agribusiness, the sixth webinar in our series featured an informative and engaging discussion. The topics included impact on cattle movement, veterinarians considering hoof diseases and Sarah and Stephen sharing what they do to make it work. The webinar is available on our website at ontariocornfedbeef.com, under Producer Resources.



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EVOLVING ONTARIO CORN FED BEEF MARKETING



John Baker

Strategic partnerships, Halal certification and a commitment to continuous improvement in sustainability are among the key initiatives for expanding the markets for the Ontario Corn Fed Beef (OCFB) Program. John Baker, Director of Brand Management and Business Development, discussed the program at the Beef Industry Convention in London, highlighting its objectives for domestic market growth and export expansion.

On the domestic side, Baker noted that 80 per cent of the imported beef comes into Ontario, which makes it unique to the rest of the country and creates challenges for marketing beef. “We are a globally recognized, important value market,” he said. “You can get in your car and drive anywhere in London, Ont., and buy imported beef from anywhere: the USA, Australia, New Zealand, Mexico, and even Japan.”

There’s also internal competition, as competitors from other provinces have their own regional

strategies. The OCFB strategy aims to strengthen Ontario’s market presence by boosting the competitiveness of the beef supply chain, involving everyone from producers to distributors and retailers. The various partnerships established over the years highlight how the program adds value and creates a distinct identity for Ontario beef in the marketplace.

In addition to providing beef to Canada’s largest food retailer, Loblaw Companies Ltd, and several small independent butcher shops that were there at the beginning, OCFB has formed many significant alliances. The recent partnership with Lone Star Texas Grill is a prime example. Ontario Corn Fed Beef is featured on the menu of the restaurant chain’s 21 locations across the province. Baker said the chain was looking to change its supply and wanted to offer something different. After comparing OCFB to its existing program and others, Lone Star officials kept returning to it and wanted to learn more. “They love the fact that we’re very transparent about it,” he said. “They love the fact that they could see how much the animals were cared for, both from an animal health perspective as well as the animal nutrition perspective. They gained a lot of confidence and made a strong commitment.”

Baker noted that a QR code on the menu takes people to a website where they can view short videos that tell the brand story of OCFB. The content includes information on the family farms and how they feed and raise the cattle. “And how that contributes to all the things that deliver consistent, high-quality beef,” he said. “But also, the benefits that it delivers back to the province of Ontario and our local communities.”

Baker explained the food service sector in Ontario is significant, representing about 40 per cent of the food service market in Canada. Ontario Corn Fed Beef has many partnerships with several companies, both large and small. Morton’s Food Service has been with OCFB since the beginning. The company has developed its own premium brand called Grassroots Ontario Beef, which is sourced from Ontario Corn Fed Beef certified cattle.

Another distributor is Rowe Beef, which

has a brand licensing agreement for OCFB. It also has a private label program that it developed in Wellington County that utilizes cattle sourced through the Ontario Corn Fed Beef Quality Assurance Program. Rowe was also instrumental in helping to develop the partnership with Lone Star Texas Grill.

On market diversification for OCFB, the program is leveraging the expanding opportunities within the Halal segment. Following up on Jim Clark’s comments about the OCFB Program being one of the first to receive Halal certification, Baker highlighted the significance of the achievement. He said it allows the program to compete in that growing market segment. What’s more, the accreditation by the Islamic Food and Nutrition Council of Canada is recognized by other major markets such as Saudi Arabia, Indonesia and the United Arab Emirates. Not only is the processing plant certified, but Baker noted it also covers the beef and cattle production system. “We’re the only beef program in Canada that’s able to achieve this level of certification,” he said.

As a result, the certification means that OCFB can maintain its market access to Saudi Arabia. In 2022, Ontario exported over \$40 million in beef to Saudi Arabia. Without the certification, OCFB would lose that valuable market. “Other than just maintaining access to that, it provides us significant growth opportunities for Ontario and other markets in the United Arab Emirates, Qatar, Kuwait and Bahrain,” said Baker. “But it also brings in the largest Muslim market in the world: Indonesia.”

Export Market Opportunities

Shifting to export markets, OCFB is marking its 10th anniversary with Kinsho Stores in Osaka, Japan, this year. Baker said the brand has become an indispensable product for the Japanese retailer. “When you have a brand that’s in a meat case after all kinds of issues and challenges and is still there 10 years later, that shows that there’s a commitment,” noted Baker, referring to the challenges of the COVID pandemic and other supply chain disruptions.

The challenges also disrupted many of the in-person promotional activities and trade events that are vital to connecting with current and new customers. In 2024, OCFB regained some of this activity, taking part in three events in Japan, including Tokyo and Osaka and one in the northern part of the country.

Market Development In Vietnam

Also, OCFB joined Canada Beef at its pavilion at the Food Show in Ho Chi Minh City in Vietnam, working with food distributor Qualifoods. “They were starting to look at becoming a licensed distributor for Ontario Corn Fed Beef,” said Baker. “Out of the Food Show, they developed confidence that it was the brand of Canadian beef that they wanted to focus on, and they wanted to develop it.”

Following the Food Show, OCFB held a brand launch in Hanoi, Vietnam, in May. Approximately 100 customers, primarily chefs and hotel food buyers, came to the event and learned more about OCFB. “It was very positive. So, it’s nice to have another committed brand partner in a growth market like Vietnam,” added Baker.

In the Middle East, market development efforts focused on trade events in Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, and Qatar. A distribution partner in Dubai, Simply Gourmet, holds an annual “gala” event in which 100 of the best customers receive an invitation. “Their response is amazing,” said Baker. “Ontario Corn Fed Beef is the premium brand of Canadian beef that Simply Gourmet offers in the market. They do offer other Canadian beef brands, but they’re more in the lower quality-grades.”

Incoming Trade Missions

Besides attending events overseas, OCFB hosted four trade missions, including two from Japan and one each from Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates. The incoming missions allow the program to engage with customers and demonstrate what makes Ontario different.

The guests included an influential chef from Dubai. Baker said the Dubai delegation had glowing reviews about OCFB, saying it was the best product in the market. The chance to experience the production aspects first-hand gave the customers even more confidence about

how farmers raise the cattle. “That is a big deal for these guys, as they know you raise the food you feed to the cattle,” added Baker. “Now he has a better understanding and appreciation.”

The tour also impressed representatives from a retailer in Fukuoka, Japan. While the group sells imported beef, one of the reps said OCFB was the best quality they’ve found. Baker said they’re now excited to promote the “best beef from Canada” in their stores. “This was a guy who wasn’t yet selling Ontario Corn Fed Beef, but he came here to learn about what it is we’re doing and why it matters,” he said. “We now have a new retail partner in Japan (with) 12 stores.”

Sustainably Raised Ontario Beef

Baker also spent some time talking about sustainably raised Ontario beef. He stressed that the idea is not about adding to what producers are already doing or creating processes that will add costs or be difficult to implement. Baker said OCFB produces a great-tasting product. The next step is to evolve the value proposition to deliver on other aspects, such as animal care and environmental benefits. He noted that

Ontario has a unique model of “circularity,” in which the producers grow their own crops to feed their animals. “We do a lot of things in Ontario around managing soil nutrients and manure. How do we make some value out of the things that we have to do?”

Baker believes that sustainability is not an achievement because it constantly changes. Instead, it’s about continuous improvement and having protocols to measure the impact. “How we work together and collaborate with our industry and government partners is a story.”

He said OCFB is working on an approach to demonstrate the benefits of the natural synergies between growing crops and feeding cattle. A video is being produced to spark some discussion and examine the opportunities for a comprehensive program that goes beyond the great-tasting beef that has been established. “We need to develop a program that has a very valid, solid, verified value proposition but has a lot of meat on the bone, so to speak,” said Baker.



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ONTARIO BOOSTS RMP FUNDING

The Beef Farmers of Ontario (BFO) and its members were thrilled to learn of the Government of Ontario's decision to increase their annual investment in the Ontario Risk Management Program (RMP) by \$100 million. The announcement, to raise the provincial investment from \$150 million to \$250 million, which will be phased in over three years, was made on January 28 by Rob Flack, Ontario's Minister of Agriculture, Food and Agribusiness at a farm in Elgin County, and reflects a request that BFO and its allied members of the Ontario Agriculture Sustainability Coalition (OASC) have been promoting for several years.

Designed as a partnership between the province and farmers who are not protected by the supply management system, RMP is a cost-shared insurance program that helps stabilize the grains, horticulture and livestock sectors by providing insurance for farmers against market volatility and production risks. Ontario farmers who are enrolled in the program, contribute 35 per cent of the costs through annual insurance premiums.

"This is one of the most important investments the province could make for our sector," shares Craig McLaughlin, BFO President. "As beef farmers, we're facing inflation and higher costs of production associated with raising livestock, fluctuating weather patterns and trade uncertainties,

all of which, go far beyond what we can mitigate through good management practices alone. As an association, we've remained steadfast in our position that the best remedy for these risks, and to help sustain our beef production and grow our economic output as a province, is to increase Ontario's investment in the RMP."

"Growing input costs and increasing uncertainty and risk in the marketplace really underpins the critical importance of having well-funded insurance programs like RMP," explains Richard Horne, BFO Executive Director. "Minister Rob Flack has been an absolute champion of this request from day one. We would be remiss if we didn't also acknowledge the groundwork laid by Minister Lisa Thompson and former Minister Ernie Hardeman for their recognition and support of the value this program provides to farmers and Ontario's economy."

For several years, Ontario farmers, represented by the non-supply managed commodities and through the work of OASC, have been unified in their request for the province to increase its investment in RMP by raising the program cap from \$150 million to \$250 million annually to ensure farmers have the tools to manage today's food production risks.

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Convention keynote speaker, Corbitt Wall, second from right, presides over some spirited bidding during the Friday night auction. Wall, the Commercial Cattle Manager and Livestock Market Analyst with DV Auction in the U.S., joined fellow volunteer auctioneers Kevin McArter, Dave Clark and Bill Haalstra. Another highlight of the Convention was keynote speaker Jeremiah Brown (pictured at far right). Jeremiah shared his inspiring journey of change that took him from merely dreaming about rowing for Canada to winning an Olympic silver medal in just four years.

To Our 27th Annual Beef Industry Convention Participants:

We want to take this time to thank you for your very generous and ongoing support of our organization moving forward.

As you well know, our Annual Beef Industry Convention has been a key part of delivering crucial messages about partnerships and change in an industry notoriously known for its independence. Our goal has been to provide events that allow for thought outside the normal box. We firmly believe that this get-together offers a catalyst for sharing thoughts and, most of all, fellowship amongst like-minded individuals. The venue also plays a significant role in bringing all the various partners and sectors under one roof.

Once again, we want to express our deep appreciation for your commitment to our organization and this annual event. Whether through a sponsorship, participation as an exhibitor, donation of auction items, or 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." We eagerly anticipate our continued collaboration with you throughout 2025 as we work together on our mission to "improve and maintain a more viable beef industry in Ontario." Your ongoing support is invaluable to us, and we look forward to achieving our shared goals together.

Best regards,

Wendy Clements
Administrator

Jim Clark
Executive Director



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MARKETING CANADIAN BEEF IN A CHANGING ENVIRONMENT



Eric Bienvenue, President, Canada Beef

The Ontario Cattle Feeders' Association was pleased to welcome a President of Canada Beef to the Convention for the first time this year. Eric Bienvenue, a leader with 30 years of senior management experience in Canada's animal protein sectors, became Canada Beef's President in March 2024.

His presentation to the Convention shared vital points about the challenges and opportunities in the beef industry. Canada Beef Inc. is an independent national organization that represents the research, marketing, and promotion of the Canadian cattle and beef industry worldwide. Drawing a comparison to Ontario Corn Fed Beef, Bienvenue remarked that Canada Beef has a similar mission to create value for the industry. "Our vision is to make beef the protein of choice," he said. "That's our consistent message everywhere."

He stressed the importance of focusing on consumers and the need to adapt to changing demographics and behaviours. "Ontario is the king of welcoming new immigrants, and that's beautiful," said Bienvenue. "That's good for our country, but we need to adapt. Our packers and stakeholders need to understand the change."

He added that consumers, especially the younger generation, want transparency in the system to see how the animals are fed and raised. "That's everywhere, and it's a trend that we're not going to go against."

Although it's a marginal drop, Bienvenue conceded that consumption is declining in the wake of higher prices. He said the average price in October was about \$21.60/kg, up 10 per cent from last year. Meanwhile, total beef consumption per capita is expected to drop to 15.3 kg from 16.2 in 2023.

With a quarter of Canada's beef consumption coming from imported beef, promoting Canadian beef is paramount. "We have to be there and making sure that people are not only consuming beef but making sure that our new consumers and customers think about Canadian or Ontario beef," said Bienvenue.

On trade, he noted that 75 per cent of Canadian beef exports go to the U.S. Japan's share is approximately nine per cent. South Korea, which has traditionally been around five per cent, has dropped to three per cent. But Bienvenue believes there's potential to raise it to five again. He's also optimistic about the Southeast Asia market. "That's a mandate that we have at Canada Beef to develop and grow the market; great potential," he said.

Bienvenue shared some of the content and messaging that Canada Beef has been working on over the past year. They've received positive comments on the "Pick the Leaf" campaign, which encourages consumers at home and abroad to look for the Canadian maple leaf that is part of the logo for Canadian beef products.

To keep up with tech-savvy consumers, UPC or barcodes on packages can be scanned, which takes people to Canada Beef's website for a wealth of information. "It's going to show you the cut that you're buying, and there's a recipe and different ways of preparing that meat," said Bienvenue.

Key messaging will continue to focus on health, wellness and the nutritional benefits of beef. Work is also being done to promote the under-utilized cuts. In Ontario, Bienvenue said they'll be promoting beef to the different ethnicities in Toronto.

In addition to its locations in Canada, there are Canada Beef offices in Mexico, Japan, Hong Kong/China, Taiwan, Vietnam and South Korea that promote the benefits of Canadian beef to retailers, food service operators and consumers abroad. "We do a lot of promotional activities, and we're there on the ground. You have to be present," said Bienvenue, stressing the need to promote Canadian beef continuously. "You have to invest; you have to provide the messaging and to get to know us as an industry."

For more information on Canada Beef, visit the website at canadabeef.ca and follow on social media on X, Facebook, Instagram, YouTube and Pinterest.


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ACHIEVING TRANSITION PLANNING SUCCESS



Ron Hanson

With a significant percentage of farms set to change hands in the next 15 years, successful succession planning is vital to the future prosperity of beef farming families.

Transition planning between generations can be an overwhelming journey with many challenges. For guidance, the Ontario Cattle Feeders' Association once again invited succession planning expert Ron Hanson to share his insight at the Beef Industry Convention.

Dr. Hanson holds the title of Harlan Agribusiness Professor Emeritus at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln. In addition to a distinguished 46-year teaching career, he has counselled farm families for more than 40 years to help them resolve family conflicts in a more positive manner.

In his first presentation at the Convention, Hanson discussed how to avoid the mistakes of a farm family succession failure. "I came to preserve and protect a legacy to make sure that a family cattle-feeding operation continues for future generations, and those young beginning producers have that opportunity," he said.

One of the main mistakes is procrastination or waiting until a farming crisis or a family emergency forces people to start the planning process." Most multi-generation family farming operations start out with the very best of intentions for passing on their farm to the next younger generation while enhancing the profitability and preserving the legacy of their family farm business," said Hanson. "But often, those intentions to pass on the farm to the next generation never happen."

He noted a key distinction between a succession plan and an estate plan. A succession plan is what can happen before your death, giving you control. An estate plan is what will happen after your death. "You are no longer in control without a plan outlining your directives and wishes to be carried out," added Hanson.

He urged families to take the initiative and make planning a priority. "Be decisive; no second-guessing, make progress and move ahead," said Hanson. "Because a plan that's never executed will accomplish nothing but frustration, disappointment and added stress."

Hanson offered four key take-home messages. First, avoid letting personal fears or worries paralyze the succession planning process. Strive for open-honest-transparent family conversations and build family trust and respect. Have the commitment to make tough succession planning decisions. Finally, it's never too early to start to plan and be proactive rather than reactive. Allowing a farming crisis or a family emergency to be the motivator to begin planning often spells failure.

In his second presentation, Hanson aimed to empower beef producers to achieve transition planning success by outlining a step-by-step decision-making process and concise management guidelines.

He recommends that farm families consider adopting five guideline planning steps. The guidelines are designed to keep family members focused on achieving the ultimate goal: keeping their farm in the family for future generations. It all starts with the parents; the first step is for them to identify and adopt a farming legacy vision for the future. Parents must begin by discussing their own expectations with each other.

Step two, drafting ideas into a plan, requires the entire family to meet to begin discussing their ideas and concerns with each other. This is the time to draft ideas into words and write them down. Hanson recommends drafting a mission statement to pass on the family farming operation.

Calling it the most important step, he encourages the family to put together a management succession team to guide them through the process to accomplish their goals. Hanson said the team should involve an accountant, a farm loan officer, an estate planning specialist and an attorney.

Step four is clarifying family member assumptions. Hanson advises that the adult farming children must visit directly with the non-farming adult children to learn and understand their feelings. The other siblings may have another view as to what is fair. Any existing jealousies and resentments must be solved, and feasible solutions must be found.

Step five involves taking control and setting deadlines. Hanson noted that a vital strategy for success is simply taking action and getting started.

For more information, Hanson's website, passingonthefarm.com, has seven videos that discuss what he shared at the Convention. Also, he is allowing The News Feed to share his contact info if anyone is seeking assistance. You can reach him at ron@passingonthefarm.com or call 402-570-1913.

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