

The News Feed

An Ontario Cattle Feeders' Publication



Spring 2026 Edition



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The 28th annual Beef Industry Convention proved to be another successful event in London in January. In addition to attracting a big crowd, several of our key partners shared their insights into the strengths of the Ontario Corn Fed Beef program and their future commitment to our flagship brand. We were thrilled to hear from Loblaws, Cargill, Flanagan Foodservice and the Canadian Alliance for Net-Zero Agri-food. Details on these stories and more inside.

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STANDING BEHIND OUR BEEF



Jim Clark, Executive Director

Consumer perception is now central to success in the beef industry. Consumers expect confidence, transparency, and alignment with their values in everything from cattle raising to beef marketing. How consumers view beef was the main theme of Jim Clark's presentation to the 2026 Beef Industry Convention. The Executive Director of the Ontario Cattle Feeders' Association and the Ontario Corn Fed Beef program said caring about the consumer has been a founding principle of the OCFB brand. "We spend a lot of time and resources on building the real story about the products that we produce and the way we produce them," explained Clark. "We were the first ones with an on-farm Quality Assurance program."

He added that the quality assurance program is a key part of the marketing story for OCFB and Ontario beef. "We have to stand behind what we produce, and it doesn't end at the farm gate," said Clark. "People want to know more of what we're doing. People are interested in it, and they want to know how their products are produced." Clark summarized data from a 2025 consumer perception survey that reinforces the view that Canadians trust their beef farmers. According to the survey, 74% agree that beef is an environmentally friendly food choice and 70% have a positive perception of Canadian beef farmers, and 86% of Canadians believe beef is a healthy food.

When it comes to the key drivers of trust, Clark noted that people are evaluating the entire package. Taste remains the number one driver, followed closely by freshness and food safety,

attributes consumers largely trust retailers and food service providers to guarantee. Price continues to matter, especially in an inflationary environment.

Values alignment is also significant. Consumers want to know that the people producing their food care about the same things they do. "People want their families eating safe food. It's no different than the rest of us," said Clark. "For our families, we want the best way the beef is produced, the product itself is incredibly loved. Our great quality in the last decade speaks for itself."

Changing consumer behaviour is also shaping the market. Younger generations are spending more on high-quality beef, both at restaurants and at home. Improved cooking skills, access to recipes, and the rise of meal delivery services have encouraged appreciation for premium beef.

While demand remains strong, the industry faces real challenges. Beef prices have risen significantly compared to the mid-2000s, particularly for premium cuts. While the prices may have an impact on future demand, they have created another set of issues, namely growing pressure from imports. Clark noted that imports from Australia are up 68% while New Zealand's are up 28%. "They realize we have the population, we have the market, and it's big," said Clark, adding that Australia's feedlot industry continues to expand. "This is what we are competing full-on with, and it's pressuring North America's beef production."

Meanwhile, Brazil represents a potential "sleeping giant." With the cattle herd approximately twice the size of the U.S., improving genetics, higher-energy diets, and expanding feedlot systems, Brazil's ability to grow its beef market is substantial.

Noting that every producer understands that markets are cyclical, Clark acknowledged the volatility of the recent months is testing their resolve. "Knowing it doesn't make it any easier to watch nearly 18.6% of inventory value disappear in a matter of weeks," he said.

Trade policy, tariffs, and potential court decisions all matter. What the sector needs is certainty.



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The News Feed is printed quarterly and distributed to all members of the OCFA through their membership fees.

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Publication Agreement Number: 41246058

Clark added that a workable trade deal with our North American partners is critical for the industry.

In Ontario, rebuilding the cow herd remains difficult, and land values are high, production capacity has left the province, and producer demographics are aging, with succession issues continuing to be significant.

When evaluating the cattle markets, the U.S. continues to set the tone with many watching the American inventory numbers. Beef cow numbers are historically low, but for Clark, the bigger story is heifer retention. "When you see their heifer inventory in feedlots at between 37 to 40% that means there's a lot of heifers still going into the feed pen that aren't going out for cows."

Another plus for the Ontario industry is the rapid expansion of dairy-on-beef cattle. While exact figures are hard to pin down, Clark estimates the number at 15 to 20% in the feedlots. "They're doing quite well," he added. "They grade well. When it comes to the fat on them, you don't

see the grade fours and fives that you would see on the other ones."

Ontario feedlots also continue to benefit from strong relationships with Virginia. The producers in the state are providing cattle that fit well into Ontario feeding systems. "We need to keep this relationship going," said Clark. "We need to make it even bigger."

Combined with dairy-on-beef, Western Canadian cattle, and Ontario-Quebec supplies, Clark added that Ontario is in a good position. While noting that feeding or harvesting cattle is not for the faint of heart, Clark said Ontario is poised to meet the challenges ahead with its infrastructure and feeding capacity. Still, the industry needs to push harder than ever on areas such as transparency, sustainability, accountability, and product quality. "We need to improve where we are in consumers' minds," said Clark.

Strong messaging needs to continue, especially around the healthy aspects of beef. It remains a nutrient-dense protein, providing zinc, iron,

and vitamin B12, all critical to immune function, cognitive health, and oxygen transport, with Clark noting that these nutrients are harder to obtain or absorb from other foods, and research continues to reinforce beef's role in a balanced diet.

Clark encouraged the producers and others in the industry to continue to own what they do and keep telling their story. He noted that producers are ambassadors, whether hosting tours, talking with consumers, or engaging online. "Never say we can't," added Clark. "It just takes a vision and a desire to make it happen. It's about being proactive and not reactive. It's about being part of the conversation and staying in that conversation."

Save The Date:

The 29th Annual Beef Industry Convention will be held Thursday, January 14 through Saturday, January 16, 2027. Producers and industry partners are encouraged to mark their calendars. Watch for details in the Summer/Fall 2026.



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BUILDING VALUE WITH A MARKET-DRIVEN APPROACH



John Baker, Director of Brand Management and Business Development

Ontario Corn Fed Beef continues to demonstrate how a focused, supply-chain-driven approach to market development creates value for producers and partners. John Baker, Director of Brand Management and Business Development, highlighted the program's accomplishments over the past year during his presentation at the Beef Industry Convention.

Baker said OCFB and the Ontario Beef Market Development program work within the supply chain, collaborating with packers, distributors, retailers, and foodservice partners. Consumer messaging on health, nutrition, and recipe development is delivered through partners such as Canada Beef and Beef Farmers of Ontario. "We leverage those wherever we can, but we're very much a trade organization," said Baker. "We focus on the supply chain."

The on-farm Quality Assurance program forms the foundation for branding and promotional activities that help Ontario beef compete with large exporters such as Australia. "It's absolutely critical that a brand has strong

fundamentals around what makes you different and unique in the marketplace," said Baker. "Not better, not cheaper—unique and different." Once strategies are in place, a key step is working with partners to promote and share the unique brand story. OCFB remains active in both retail and foodservice, with a strong emphasis on Ontario-based partners. On the retail side, the program's exclusive partnership with Loblaw Companies Limited, now in its 13th year, remains a cornerstone across five banners.

In foodservice, OCFB prioritizes collaboration with Ontario-owned distributors facing pressure from multinational competitors. A key example is Flanagan Foodservice, which in 2026 marks the ninth anniversary of the Carve Premium Beef program. "Flanagan's made a huge commitment to the Ontario beef industry to develop their own brand of premium Ontario beef, all based on Ontario Corn-Fed, quality-assured cattle," said Baker.

Restaurant partnerships further strengthen OCFB's farm-to-fork story. Chains such as Lone Star Texas Grill feature OCFB on their menus, with QR codes linking diners to farm videos and production stories. "When you can have that right on a menu, it makes that direct connection between the steak that's coming to your plate and the history of where that came from," added Baker. "Without that connection, it's really just a piece of meat at a price."

International markets remain a strategic priority, especially Japan, Vietnam, and the Middle East (UAE and Saudi Arabia). In 2025, OCFB marked the 10-year anniversary of its entry into Japan. Since 2015, the program has worked closely with Cargill, Prima Meat Packers, and Kinsho Stores of Osaka, Japan.

Anniversary celebrations included visits to Ontario farms and processors, a reception at the Osaka World Expo, in-store promotions, and consumer engagement events that reinforced brand credibility. OCFB is now sold in 268 stores across Japan with several retail partners, including Lucky and Food-D, which joined in late 2025.

The brand continues to build momentum in Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) markets. Inbound buyer tours have included executive chefs from luxury hotels and key distributors such as Simply Gourmet. "Value is created on the farm, and it's all founded under the Quality Assurance program," explained Baker, adding that defined feeding protocols and QA standards have been critical in maintaining access to sensitive markets such as Saudi Arabia.

Building on that foundation, OCFB is expanding its focus to include measurable environmental outcomes. Ontario's integrated cattle and crop systems support sustainable practices, including crop rotations, nutrient cycling, and improvements in soil health. Through a new partnership with the Canadian Alliance for Net-Zero Agri-food (CANZA), OCFB is helping producers measure and verify these outcomes. The News Feed has more on this partnership with CANZA on page 8.

As Ontario Corn Fed Beef looks to the future, the strategy remains grounded in collaboration, credibility, and continuous improvement. "These partnerships have an opportunity to move forward in a way that we believe is truly unique in the beef and cattle industry," added Baker.



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QUALITY: IT'S A GAME-CHANGER FOR BEEF



Dr. Nevil Speer

Beef prices are high, and while many market watchers focus on tight cattle supplies, Dr. Nevil Speer points out a more important factor shaping today's cattle and beef markets: a major shift in demand driven by improved product quality.

Speer, an industry consultant based in Bowling Green, Kentucky, and a regular contributor to Feedstuffs and BEEF Magazine, delivered his insights at the Beef Industry Convention. "We miss that the quality of the product has improved dramatically over the last 20 years," explained Speer. "It's not even close to where we were. The availability of high-quality products is off the charts compared to what it was."

Recent improvements in beef quality, paired with evolving consumer expectations, are reshaping industry demand. According to Speer, this isn't just a short-term, supply-driven rally, but rather a durable, demand-led market. This shift is driven by better eating experiences, increased consumer loyalty, and a clear willingness to pay for value.

Consumer research continues to show that the number one reason people buy beef is simple: taste. In repeated demand surveys, taste consistently tops the list, far ahead of factors such as origin, traceability, or labeling. "If you're on Family Feud and they ask, 'Why do you buy beef?' the number one answer—time after time—is taste," said Speer.

Over the past 15 years, the grading profile of North American beef has changed fundamentally. Producers have increased premium beef, Prime

plus the upper two-thirds of Choice, from roughly 30% of production in 2010 to about 45% today. The share of Select has fallen from around 30% to near 10%.

Prices have risen alongside quality, but Speer said that relationship is both logical and unavoidable. "Name me a product where you have access to more quality and prices don't go up," he said.

Drawing a comparison to automotive sales, Speer noted that pickup trucks are better—and more expensive—than they were 15 years ago. "We continue to see consumers willing to make sacrifices to trade up for quality, convenience, and wellness."

Historically, major cattle price rallies have been due to reduced protein supply, but this cycle's rally is driven by consumers paying \$2 more (in real terms) and still eating about 59 pounds of beef per person. This signals a fundamental shift in demand, not just supply. "That's a change in demand," said Speer. "This is not a supply-driven rally. It's different."

Demographics are reinforcing the trend. Millennials are now in their prime earning years, and their purchasing decisions differ from those of previous generations. They value experiences, transparency, sustainability, and trust—often as much as the product itself. "Now we can put our heads in the sand, or we can embrace that," said Speer.

The shift toward higher quality is pushing beef further away from commodity status and toward branded, value-driven solutions. Retailers and restaurants increasingly rely on high-quality beef as a cornerstone. "Beef is serving as an anchor as we've never seen before," Speer said. "It really drives store traffic and customer loyalty all around."

Despite naysayers and the "noise" surrounding beef production, Speer believes the business is more durable than ever. While encouraging Ontario producers to stay the course, he said that doesn't mean standing still. "You're going to have to keep making the effort to win," Speer added. "Stay the course, stay the process. The process is the prize."



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THE RISKS AND REWARDS OF EXTENDING THE FEEDING PERIOD



Dr. Jessica Sperber

With cattle prices at historical highs and feedlot margins under increased pressure, a keynote presentation at the Beef Industry Convention focused on the implications of larger carcass sizes.

Dr. Jessica Sperber, Assistant Professor and Extension Feedlot Specialist from the University of Nebraska-Lincoln, covered the evolution of cattle feeding practices over 70 years in North America, noting changes in animal types and weights. Looking back to 1953, Sperber said it was typical to have British-type animals that were short-statured and finished at 1,000 pounds. By 1973, the industry shifted to taller animals finishing at 1,200 pounds. In 1987, she noted that the Excel Packing Company announced its carcass specifications for steers and heifers, with the ideal heifer finishing at 1,090 pounds, live body weight. Fast-forwarding to 2025, she showed pictures in a Nebraska feedlot of a steer that finished at 1,706 pounds and a hot carcass weight at 1,103 pounds.

Commenting on the evolution towards heavier carcasses, she noted that the heavyweight discount for hot carcasses was 1,000 pounds in 2017. Meanwhile, the industry has recently changed that to 1,100 pounds. “If you think back to just 1987, when a 1,000-pound live animal was the body-weight spec, we now allow those 1,100-pound hot carcass weights into the supply chain,” she added.

The rewards of feeding to heavier weights include more pounds to sell, greater value when sold dressed and marbling potential. “We know that increasing days on feed increases the marbling outcome,” said Sperber. “In Canada, on AAA and Prime over a 15-year trend, we’ve been increasing year over year, now sitting at a 78 per cent AAA and Prime combined, which is very exceptional for a lot of continental genetics in this country.”

She also explained the benefit of improved carcass transfer. The term essentially means the pounds of live gain that end up on the carcass. Sperber said the live weight gain slows to about 80 per cent of the average at the end of the feeding period. While the animals are gaining less, 80 per cent of their live-weight gain occurs in the carcass rather than in other organs such as the lungs, heart, or kidneys. “So, they are still becoming profitable for you,” she added.

Citing data from Merck Animal Health, Sperber discussed the profitability of increasing the carcass weight and feeding for an additional 10 days. Even at the end of the feeding period, when cattle are large, they still gain two pounds of hot carcass weight per day. At \$5.00 dressed weight per pound, that works out to \$100, minus the feed costs of \$1.00 per day. “(There’s) \$80 profit by feeding the animals 10 days,” she added.

The rewards also come with various risks, notably feed efficiency declines, late-term death loss, bovine congestive heart failure, liver abscesses, discounts for yield grades 4 and 5, and excess backfat, which could increase the risk of heat stress.

When examining the health challenges associated with heavier cattle, Sperber noted that respiratory issues can occur throughout the feeding period. Another key challenge is musculoskeletal, which involves lameness and foot problems. “We know that at least some of these cattle are getting a little bit too large for what their overall body and bone density allow them to have,” said Sperber. “We’re seeing more broken legs, and we’re seeing more downer animals.”

Towards the end of the presentation, Sperber discussed a slide showing key metrics from research published in 2023 (Gaylean et al.) on extending the feeding period from 200 to 210 days. Dry matter intake will increase by 0.05 pounds per day. Average daily gain decreases by 0.05 pounds per day. Feed conversion marginally decreases by less than 0.1%. Final shrink body weight increases by 26 pounds. “But here’s the metric that I like to use: Twenty additional pounds of hot carcass weight,” said Sperber. “That’s where I got those two pounds of hot carcass weight (per day) at the end of the feeding period.”

In addition, the dressing percentage increases by 0.25% every 10 days. The marbling score increases by 0.87. Choice Grade increases by 2.79 per cent, but there’s a 2.39 per cent increase in Yield Grade fours and fives.

“So, there are risks, and there are a lot of rewards,” concluded Sperber, adding that it’s an exciting time to be in the industry right now.

Chinese Market Reopens to Canadian Beef

The Canadian Cattle Association (CCA) has welcomed the restoration of Canadian beef access to China, marking an important step forward for the sector after trade was halted in 2021. The association says it will continue working closely with government officials and industry partners to better understand the details of the renewed access, including any potential safeguard measures.

“We are pleased to see renewed access into China, one of the world’s largest beef markets,” said CCA President Tyler Fulton. “Every market matters to Canadian beef farmers and ranchers, and access like this supports the resilience and long-term growth of our industry.”

As Canada continues discussions around trade diversification, CCA reaffirmed its commitment to advocating for Canadian beef producers by working to remove non-tariff barriers in existing markets and supporting new free trade agreements that deliver meaningful market access for the sector.

Strengthening relationships with trusted trading partners who adhere to international, rules-based trade remains a top priority for the association. “We remain focused on expanding market access and securing the best possible trade outcomes for Canadian beef producers,” Fulton added.

China halted imports of Canadian beef in December 2021 following Canada’s atypical case of BSE. Prior to the suspension, Canadian beef exports to China had shown steady growth.



Faith in our members, Pride in our product.



Convention keynote speaker Filipe Masetti, pictured left, shared his journey to becoming the youngest person to ride a horse across the Americas, covering 70,000 miles from Alaska to Argentina. Filipe faced numerous challenges, including crossing international borders, dealing with dangerous wildlife and overcoming personal fears. He emphasized the importance of resilience, tenacity, and planning. Pictured right, volunteer auctioneers Kevin McArter, Dave Clark and Bill Haalstra presided over another highly entertaining and successful auction.

To our 28th Annual Beef Industry Convention Participants,

On behalf of our organization, we would like to sincerely thank you for your generous and continued support as we move forward.

As you know, the Annual Beef Industry Convention has long been a cornerstone for delivering important messages around partnership and change within an industry traditionally defined by its independence. Our objective has always been to create an event that encourages thinking beyond the conventional, while fostering open dialogue and meaningful connections. We firmly believe this gathering serves as a catalyst for sharing ideas and, just as importantly, for strengthening fellowship among like-minded individuals. The venue itself plays a vital role in bringing together the many partners and sectors that make up our industry under one roof.

Once again, we extend our deep appreciation for your commitment to both our organization and this annual event. Whether through sponsorship, participation as an exhibitor, donation of auction items, or support through the fundraising auction, your involvement makes it possible for us to deliver high-quality speakers and programming that are essential to the future success of our industry.

Thank you for your ongoing support. We look forward to continued collaboration throughout 2026 as we work together toward our mission of improving and maintaining a more viable beef industry in Ontario. Your commitment is invaluable, and we are excited to achieve our shared goals together.

Wendy Clements
Administrator

Jim Clark
Executive Director



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REWARDING SUSTAINABLE CORN PRODUCTION



Emily Robinson, Million Acre Challenge Program Manager

The Ontario Corn Fed Beef Program is actively involved in a new initiative that aims to support farmers in adopting sustainable crop management practices. Launched by the Canadian Alliance for Net-Zero Agri-Food (CANZA), the Million Acre Challenge seeks to reward farmers for utilizing beneficial practices.

CANZA collaborates with farmers, organizations, food and beverage processors and retailers, and researchers to develop and scale practical solutions that reduce emissions, improve environmental outcomes, and create new value across the agri-food system. Founding members include Loblaw Companies Limited, Maple Leaf, McCain, and RBC. Emily Robinson, Program Manager for the Challenge, gave the Beef Industry Convention attendees a closer look at the program.

At the core of CANZA's work is the belief that farmers are already delivering meaningful environmental benefits through everyday land management. The Million Acre Challenge is designed to support those efforts by reducing financial risk and creating opportunities to generate additional value. "We understand that farmers are true stewards of their land and

produce a lot of really important environmental benefits in owning and managing that land," said Robinson. "We want to help you on that journey to produce revenue streams potentially from those positive environmental benefits that you're creating."

There are two interconnected pieces to the initiative. Robinson explained that the Million Acre Challenge is a farmer-facing cost-share and agronomic support program. The second is a long-term vision for an environmental outcomes marketplace. "The overall goal of this is to de-risk and reward farmers' adoption of beneficial management practices," she said. "We are really focused on the Million Acre Challenge program on the corn side of production."

The farmer benefits include per-acre payments for adopting new beneficial management practices, two rounds of soil carbon sampling, access to an online platform to both support the farmer through the program and to generate peer-to-peer learning, and, along with technical guidance and access to performance data, agronomic support via a Certified Crop Advisor to create a cropping plan. Producers can continue working with their existing advisor or connect with one through the program.

Participation in the program includes free soil carbon sampling by a CANZA rep before the project starts and again three years later to track changes and environmental benefits on the farm. "We have this capacity to be able to measure and track and give you that kind of data and information on a lot of these really positive things that are happening on the farm," added Robinson.

The environmental outcomes marketplace will introduce a user-friendly platform to navigate

existing incentive programs. The platform is being designed to facilitate collaboration between farmers, companies, and other industry leaders, enabling participants to support environmental outcomes on the farm. It also brings existing programs together, so farmers receive better support across their entire crop rotation and receive credit for all the environmental benefits they deliver. "We're doing a lot of that legwork to streamline those application processes into one space," said Robinson, adding that the streamlined process may help to unlock higher per-acre payments through a stacked incentives model, which could allow farmers to access multiple funding streams for overlapping benefits.

On the partnership with Ontario Corn Fed Beef, Robinson said there are strong synergies between the OCFB's mandate to enhance a more sustainable beef industry and the goals of the Million Acre Challenge. "We have this capacity to measure and understand better what's happening on that corn side of the operation, and capture some of those outcomes in a way that's tangible for the suppliers that you might be working with," said Robinson.

She suggested that an OCFB member participating in the Challenge could use CANZA's data-collection platform and financial support to continue expanding new practices through the OCFB Quality Assurance Program.

Participation in the Million Acre Challenge is voluntary, but Robinson added that CANZA hopes to offer farmers a streamlined process for rewarding them for their important role in land stewardship.

The organization's website – canza.ca – has more details about the alliance and the Million Acre Challenge.

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LOBLAWS ADVANCING SUSTAINABLE SOURCING



Melanie Agopian, Loblaw Companies Ltd.

Ontario Corn Fed Beef's long-standing partnership with Loblaws demonstrates the retailer's commitment to sustainable sourcing, supplier collaboration, and regenerative agriculture. Speaking to the Beef Industry Convention, Melanie Agopian, Loblaw Companies Ltd., VP, Strategy, Supplier Engagement & Responsible Sourcing, outlined how her background, the company's environmental, social and governance (ESG) priorities, and its supplier engagement strategy align with the future of the Ontario Corn Fed Beef program and its recent collaboration with the Canadian Alliance for Net-Zero Agri-food (CANZA).

Agopian brings more than 20 years of experience working across food supply chains, much of it on the fresh side of the business. She emphasized the importance of direct engagement with producers. "One of the best ways I've learned about the various facets of our food industry here in Canada is by doing visits on farms," she said. "It's really where my happy place is, where I get to learn so much about the challenges and the opportunities that our suppliers face, and how we can better partner."

At the centre of Loblaws' approach is its corporate purpose: helping Canadians live life well. According to Agopian, that purpose informs all decision-making, including ESG strategy and reporting. "Our environment, social and governance efforts have two big pillars," she

explained. "It's fighting climate change, and it's advancing social equity."

Within climate action, Loblaws prioritizes greenhouse gas emissions reduction and waste elimination—efforts that directly influence sourcing requirements. One example is the company's transition away from plastics. "We're really proud to say that close to 100% of our private label plastic packaging now meets golden design rules for better recyclability," Agopian said.

In the meat department, this included a shift from Styrofoam trays to PET plastic trays, achieved in collaboration with suppliers and now fully recyclable.

Loblaws also works to provide customers with products that meet strong standards for animal welfare, sustainable ingredients, and ethical sourcing. These efforts are communicated through various certifications.

Loblaws is also a strong supporter of regenerative agriculture. The company was a founding member of the Million Acre Challenge, and at the Food Leadership Summit in Calgary, Chairman Galen Weston announced a \$7 million catalytic contribution through the Weston Foundation. This forms part of a broader \$50 million commitment to regenerative agriculture in Canada.

Connecting these themes to Loblaw's multi-year partnership with Ontario Corn Fed Beef, Agopian noted the brand is distributed across 400 stores and six banners in Ontario, with the recent expansion into No Frills. "With the well-established structure that Ontario Corn Fed Beef has as it relates to maintaining and verifying a high-quality standard, the work with CANZA, I believe, adds another layer to that existing strong foundation," Agopian said.

Looking ahead, Loblaws sees continued opportunity to deliver value across the supply chain. "I'm really excited to continue to work with the CANZA team and the Ontario Corn Fed Beef team over the coming weeks and months on this great effort," Agopian said.

Cargill Sees Opportunity In Ontario's Beef Sector



Jarrod Gillig, Cargill Food

Despite tight cattle supplies and pressures on the beef value chain, Cargill asserts that the Canadian beef sector, especially in Ontario, is positioned for long-term success. Jarrod Gillig, Senior Vice President and Managing Director – Beef for Cargill Food North America, shared his insights at the Beef Industry Convention. Gillig emphasized the importance of long-standing partnerships, targeted infrastructure investment, and sustainability.

Cargill's relationship with the Ontario Cattle Feeders' Association spans nearly three decades, a partnership Gillig described as foundational to the company's Canadian footprint. The acquisition of Cargill's Guelph, Ont., facility roughly 20 years ago further anchored that commitment.

Gillig highlighted the Ontario Corn Fed Beef program as a leading example of producer-driven innovation that connects directly with consumers. "There is nowhere else in North America that has this figured out," he said. "How do we truly come back to a consumer? How do we talk about the pride of what we're doing? I think Ontario Corn Fed Beef truly does show that."

He added that sustainability initiatives such as the Canadian Alliance for Net-Zero Agri-food (CANZA) further strengthen the program's relevance. "Now with the opportunity of the CANZA, that can even get cooler," Gillig said.

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From a market perspective, Gillig pointed to historically low cattle inventories across North America. Another significant factor is carcass weights. "You have some of the largest carcass weights in North America," Gillig noted. "But we are able to process that. It's an observation that we probably need to be aware of."

Investment remains central to Cargill's strategy in Canada. Gillig said the company aligns its capital spending with regions where producers are also investing. "As we look at making investments, we're going to make investments where other investments are being made," he said, adding that Cargill plans to continue making additional investments in the Guelph facility.

Gillig urged industry stakeholders to look beyond internal competition and focus on the broader protein marketplace. "The competition is actually outside of the beef industry," he said. "It is whether we've got competing proteins that other people have a choice to make and truly figuring out how to make beef number one should be all of our goals."

Programs designed to manage risk and improve supply chain alignment are part of that effort. Cargill's contract cattle program helps producers manage volatility while providing the company with greater certainty around supply and quality. "We hope, and we believe, that it allows you to forward contract cattle," Gillig said. "What it allows for us is actually to take a position with our customers, knowing and understanding when those cattle and the quality of the cattle that are coming in, so that I can better sell that beef and make it work."

Ultimately, Gillig said Cargill's approach to sustainability and innovation is rooted in shared success across the supply chain. "As we think about winning, we truly do think it's important to win, and all of us can win in this process," he said. "You are truly the start of our supply chain, and it truly is important for us."

FLANAGAN FOODSERVICE AND OCFB GROW A HOMEGROWN SUCCESS STORY



Steve Davidson, Flanagan Foodservice

In a Canadian foodservice landscape dominated by multinational distributors, Flanagan Foodservice continues to stand apart by staying close to home, both geographically and philosophically. Based in Kitchener, Ontario, the family-owned company has built its business by servicing independent restaurants, small-town operators, and multi-generational family businesses across Eastern Canada.

"We're actually based in Kitchener, Ontario, which pretty much sets us aside from most of the competitors," said Steve Davidson, VP Category Management & Specialty Companies, noting that major competitors are largely U.S.-based. "When I'm speaking to farmers, it's pretty much people in our backyard that we service, all the mom-and-pop shop restaurants, a lot of small towns."

Founded in 1973 with a single truck delivering milk and butter to local communities, Flanagan Foodservice has grown into a \$2.4-billion operation in Ontario alone. Today, the company services roughly 7,000 customers, supports more than 10,000 meals per day, and employs a 70-person Ontario-based sales team. "Our mission statement is very, very simple: service excellence," Davidson said. "Customers want their product when they order it. They want it right when it shows up."

That philosophy extends beyond logistics. Many Flanagan sales representatives are former chefs, butchers, and industry professionals who help customers with menu innovation, product selection, and profitability, a critical advantage for independent operators without

corporate support teams. "People do business with people that they like to do business with," Davidson said. "They're actually helping people understand menu innovation, understand what customers are looking for."

One of the most successful examples of this partnership-driven approach is Carve, Flanagan's Ontario Corn Fed Beef program, which features locally raised beef and strict quality standards, and was developed in collaboration with Ontario beef producers. Now in its ninth year, the program surpassed one million pounds sold last year. "The customer relationship they have with this brand is probably the strongest I've ever seen," Davidson said. "The way that the customers believe in this brand and believe in the product that you produce really signifies what was developed nine years ago."

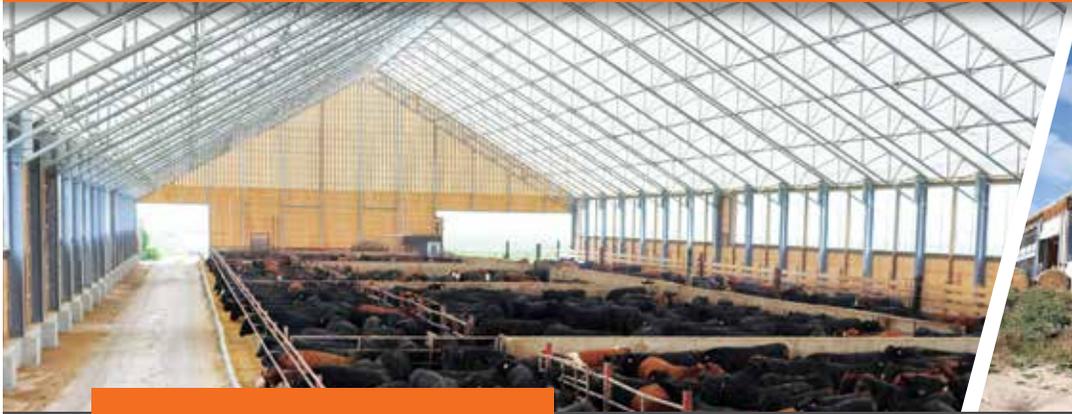
Originally focused on AAA Ontario Corn Fed middle meats, the Carve program has expanded significantly, both in the variety of cuts offered and in meeting the needs of diverse restaurant segments. Flanagan recently introduced Carve Legacy, which provides accessible AAA-or-higher Ontario beef, and Carve Primal Black, a premium, prime-grade line targeting top-tier dining experiences and highlighting the best of Ontario-raised beef.

"Our only ask is that it's prime," Davidson said of the Primal Black program, noting that they've never seen demand for Canadian and Ontario beef like they're seeing now. "Typically, to get the amount of prime that the restaurants need, we had to go to the States. We don't need to go to the States anymore."

As the Canadian restaurant industry rebounds and evolves, Davidson believes local partnerships and authentic stories will continue to resonate with both operators and diners. "We're very excited about being able to segment the Carve program and our two new segmentations of that are going to continue to drive such a great story between our two groups," he added.



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