



ACFA Annual Report to Members 2008-09

Introduction

In my third year as CEO of the Alberta Cattle Feeders' Association (ACFA) I witnessed the true dedication of our Directors and other member volunteers who demonstrated their support for this organization and the industry as a whole. In the association business, the time of the volunteer is "our currency", for without the volunteers we would have nothing. The individuals who commit their time and money to ACFA bring vibrancy and credibility to our organization and the initiatives we touch. I sincerely thank each and every one of our volunteers for an outstanding year.

The reason I wanted to talk about our volunteers is to start setting the stage for our AGM and to encourage cattle feeder members to consider running for a seat on the Board. We're entering a very interesting time for the industry and we need to continue to attract new talent to our Board. During our Strategic Planning Session last year, the Board engaged in a discussion about outreach to the membership and how we attract the next generation to the Board. It was agreed that we should review our governance model and by-laws and that will be done in the year ahead.

Administration

This past year was a busy one for the Association. We were fully engaged in executing our Strategic Plan and the discussions surrounding the Alberta Livestock and Meat Strategy. We also saw increased activity with the National Cattle Feeders' Association (NCFA) which absorbed more time of the staff. Both Boards undertook an assessment of the activities that we are involved with and agreed that to continue to be effective we require additional help. It was decided that we needed to recruit a Manager, Policy and Research who will work for both associations.



Sarah Hilderman who joined us as Administrative Assistant and ALPS Coordinator has been a most welcome addition to our staff. Jennifer Brunette will be on maternity leave starting in late January and we have hired a contractor, Stacy Byer, to manage events while Jennifer is away. Joe Novecosky continues as our Financial Manager.

We had budgeted for a deficit last year but came on a break even basis. The Board signed off on the Business Plan which evolved from our Strategic Plan. A multi-year budget was developed to identify initiatives for the next fiscal year and subsequent years. The Business Plan will be unveiled at the AGM. Its primary focus is to promote more branded beef initiatives at home and abroad in an effort to grow the business.

Membership has risen each of the past three years. Membership fees for 2009-10 year will remain at 50 cents/head, marketed in the preceding year. These fees, augmented by conference revenues, are used to cover the operating costs of the organization. Any remaining funds are used for programs and projects. Going forward, with a refundable check-off, additional funds will be available to devote to worthwhile initiatives. This will be discussed at the upcoming AGM.

Events

The sixth annual Alberta Beef Industry Conference, *"Concepts to Commerce – World Class Solutions"*, attracted a record 640 delegates. The lineup of international speaker was a first for the ABIC and generated favourable comments from those in attendance. We were pleased the growing number of young faces in the audience. To capitalize on this we assembled a committee of young producers to help us plan a special day just prior to the start of the ABIC, for students and producers which we have called, *"Big on Beef – What's @ Steak?"* This will expose up and coming producers and conference goes to our event and encourage them to mix with delegates during the conference.

Attendance at the ACFA Golf Tournament and Great Big Alberta BBQ also grew. We had more sponsors and more activity on the course which made for a very enjoyable day at Paradise Canyon. We also use this event to reach out to municipal councillors in the south to better acquaint them with the ACFA and our members. We were honoured to have Minister Groeneveld and his Executive Assistant, Mike Norris join us for the day. We have a real opportunity to grow the Great Big Albert BBQ and we thank AB Foods for their sponsorship and for providing us with a superb offering of wagu beef again this year.

Issues and Advocacy

The past year has been a challenging one for the beef industry as we experienced severe weather, drought, soft markets, a major downsizing of the cow herd and felt the impact of mCOOL in the USA. We had input on the design of insurance programs and other government initiated proposals. The many issues that impact cattle feeding require a constant dialogue with the government, which is why a good government relations program is vital for ACFA.

ACFA continues to build a solid government relations program. We also reached out to other like minded organizations with the creation of the Beef Industry Alliance (BIA). The first and most important focus for the BIA was to give producers a choice by making the check-off refundable. The primary purpose of this effort had less to do with check-off dollars and more to do with developing a more collaborative industry governance model. Bill 43, Marketing of Agricultural Products Amendment Act, 2009 (No. 2) created a mandatory refundable check-off. This issue has been debated at length for 40 years and past plebiscites demonstrated that the industry was evenly divided. Now we have an enduring plebiscite where producers can vote every year with their dollars. When refunds become available it is imperative that producers continue to invest the check-off in industry organizations of their choice in order to move the industry forward.

The Cattle Marketing Regulation, which is to be approved by January 1, 2010 will define how the collection and refund process works. Sometime after April 1, 2010 producers will be entitled seek refunds. ACFA and other cattle industry organizations feel that Livestock Identification Services Ltd is best positioned to administer the collection and refund of check-off dollars. We have made our views know to ABP and Marketing Council on this matter.

We continue to build relationships with senior government executives and elected officials. Government officials are often invited to attend our Board meetings on issue specific topics. Our second annual MLA dinner was well attended and featured directors carving prime rib at each table. We met with Rural Caucus in February to outline our views on industry governance and the check-off. ACFA staff and directors attended the Premier's dinners and other MLA events throughout the year.

ACFA is plugged into the Natural Resources Conservation Board (NRCB) via the Policy Advisory Committee where we have input on and get information back on the activities of the NRCB. We continue to work with our partners on the Intensive Livestock Working Group whose main focus remains on environmental issues. The Board was also briefed on the Land Use Framework and we are evaluating how the focus on cumulative effects could impact cattle feeders.

We are also engaged in the development of the Alberta Animal Health Strategy which has offered the opportunity to blend some of our priorities into the document which also addresses animal care. ACFA is an active supporter of Alberta Farm Animal Care and provided additional funds to the Vet on Call program when it was running a deficit.

ACFA led the creation of the Feed Grain Coalition that worked over the past year on a new Feed Grain Strategy that was announced in December. This will see the formation of a Secretariat that will drive the Strategy. ACFA will help fund the Secretariat.

Communications

Work began on a redesigned website. We are seeking a more contemporary look and something that will offer greater value for members. Changes will appear early in 2010. Members are reminded that Minutes from all ACFA Board meetings are posted in the Member Only section of the website.

Ringside Newsletters were issued periodically with newsworthy items. ACFA took out ads in Alberta Beef Magazine to reach out to members and new member prospects. ACFA, acting in the capacity as secretariat for the BIA also placed advertisements in trade publications to promote the value of choice for producers. BIA held an inaugural round table meeting which attracted representatives from a number of cattle industry organizations. The BIA Round Table offers a great forum for like minded organizations to focus on common issues and activities and bring the industry together on a voluntary basis.

ACFA contracted Serecon Management Consulting to undertake an assessment of the economic impact of the Alberta cattle feeding industry on the Alberta economy. The report calculates the economic impact based on using representative cattle feeding expenditures, reflective of the varying scales and geographic locations of Alberta feedlots. This report which will be available in early 2010 will be used in our communications efforts.

In closing I would like to express my appreciation to a dedicated Board of Directors and an outstanding staff team for their support. Jack de Boer is finishing his term as our Chairman so I take this opportunity to thank him for his reliability, professionalism and preparedness for all meetings. I would also convey my sincere thanks to all the members who continue to support this association.

Respectfully submitted,
Bryan D. Walton
CEO