

Environmental Stewardship

Background

Alberta is one of the best places in North America to feed cattle, and that is why the province currently ranks as the fourth largest feeding jurisdiction after Texas, Nebraska, and Kansas. Alberta's natural grasslands provide ample grazing, and the grasslands themselves are enhanced from that grazing. Alberta also offers an adequate supply of fresh water, and the province's extensive irrigation network facilitates the production of forages and feed. Alberta is central to extensive ranching operations in the bordering provinces of British Columbia and Saskatchewan, and cattle feeders also enjoy proximity to Canada's largest beef processing facilities. At the same time, all natural resource development carries with it a range of environmental issues and concerns, and cattle feeding is no exception.

Guiding Principle

Environmental stewardship is an important component of our industry's overall sustainability, and comprises a key pillar of our social license to operate. Environmental stewardship is a core value for ACFA not only because it is the right thing to do, but Alberta's cattle feeders themselves have a significant vested interest in sustainable environmental practices. Cattle feeders live on the same land where they operate, and the industry itself is defined by multi-generational family ownership. Land stewardship and care of the physical environment are critical to managing and sustaining a successful and long-term cattle feeding operation.

Position

Modern confined feeding operations (CFOs) are an environmentally sound and responsible method of raising beef cattle. Investment in a range of safe, proven, and highly efficient production technologies including improved genetic potential, feed efficient animals, high quality feeds, improved feeding regimens, high-energy rations, growth implants, antimicrobials, and feed additives combine to produce more pounds of beef while occupying less land, consuming less water, and limiting atmospheric emissions.

ACFA believes that to be effective, all environmental regulations and best management practices must be based on sound research and evidence-based science. To this end, ACFA promotes transparency in regulation-making, and science-based measuring, monitoring, and benchmarking. This approach will assure the best possible environmental outcomes for managing Alberta's water (allocation and quality of surface and groundwater water), air (dust, odour, ammonia, greenhouse gas emissions), and land (geographic footprint and manure management).

ACFA supports the province's *Agriculture Operations Practices Act (AOPA)*, which sets out the environmental regulatory framework for CFOs and the process by which environmental concerns and conflicts are managed and decided. ACFA believes AOPA to be a valuable tool, ensuring that Alberta's livestock industry can grow to meet the opportunities of local and world markets in an environmentally sustainable manner.

As such, ACFA members work diligently to meet all applicable environmental standards, regulations, and requirements as set by the *Department of Alberta Environment and Parks*, the *Department of Alberta Agriculture and Forestry*, and detailed in the AOPA and managed by the *Natural Resources Conservation Board (NRCB)*. This includes, among other things, requirements for the storage and spreading of manure, the maintenance of records, and regular testing of soil and water as required.

ACFA believes that its commitment to environmental stewardship must go beyond meeting current regulations and requirements, but also includes efforts to improve and enhance environmental outcomes. To that end, ACFA values partnerships with other groups such as the *Intensive Livestock Working Group (ILWG)*, the *Canadian Roundtable for Sustainable beef (CRSB)*, and the *Agri-Environmental Partnership of Alberta (AEPA)*. ACFA is also committed to building and maintaining a productive working relationship with the NRCB, including participation on its *Policy Advisory Group (PAG)*, and to support ongoing efforts to improve technologies that enhance environmental stewardship.

This commitment to environmental improvement manifests itself in the participation of ACFA members in environmental research and projects designed to find improvements. Examples of this commitment include:

- *Livestock Impact on Groundwater Quality study in Alberta*: This Alberta Agriculture and Forestry project is monitoring and measuring potential impacts of livestock production on groundwater sources at several locations in southern Alberta. Monitoring is ongoing at the feedlots of several ACFA members.

- *Alberta Phosphorus Watershed Project:* This is a collaborative project of Alberta Agriculture and Forestry, the Intensive Livestock Working Group (ILWG) the Alberta Livestock and Meat Agency (ALMA), Kneehill County, and Red Deer County. In this project, researchers are working directly with producers to determine if the adoption of several beneficial management practices (BMPs) can reduce or minimize nutrient loss from agricultural operations in two agricultural watersheds—Acme Creek near Acme, AB and Tindastoll Creek near Penhold, AB.

Going forward, ACFA believes that new production technologies and innovative efficiencies are going to be even more important as the global population continues to grow and demand for beef increases. In 2006, the *Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO)* of the UN published a report exploring the global environmental challenges of livestock production, and concluded that the best way to mitigate the future environmental impacts of livestock production is to focus on more efficient modes of production.

ACFA believes that any future regulatory initiatives, particularly limits on phosphorus, should reflect sound science, be flexible, and also recognize the ability of cattle feeders to manage their environmental risks. ACFA will work to ensure that any new regulatory initiatives should not detract from the competitiveness of the cattle feeding sector. With respect to bio-digesters and bio-gas development, ACFA recognizes that the current technology and significant upfront capital costs means most projects are not economically feasible and would require substantial government investment and support. At the same time, the cattle feeding sector has an immense capacity for innovation, and the sector is open to exploring and testing alternative methods of manure and effluent disposal.

Actions

- ACFA will communicate its environmental commitment by sounding a consistent and clear message—that Alberta cattle feeders do more than follow environmental regulations, they often exceed them, and we value the environment just as much as every other stakeholder in the province Alberta.
- ACFA will continue to collaborate on environmental issues with other industry partners through the *Intensive Livestock Working Group (ILWG)*, the *Canadian Roundtable for Sustainable Beef (CRSB)*, the *Agri-Environmental Partnership of Alberta (AEPA)*, and the *Policy Advisory Group (PAG)* of the NRCB. These bodies allow cattle feeders to engage on environmental issues in collaborative and strategic fashion.
- ACFA and its members will continue to participate in valuable environmental research projects designed to improve outcomes and test new technologies and approaches.
- ACFA will continue working to build positive and constructive working relationships with environmental regulators, including Alberta Environment and Parks and the Natural Resources Conservation Board (NRCB).
- ACFA will complete an environmental scan of outlining the current and future risks, and the threats and opportunities that they present. This scan will provide a baseline overview of current environmental issues and help set future research priorities and environmental programming.

Key Messages

- *Cattle feeding is a vital component of environmental sustainability in the western Canadian prairies.*
- *The modern cattle feeding operation is an environmentally sound and responsible method of raising beef cattle as it produces more pounds of beef while occupying less land, consuming less water, and limiting atmospheric emissions.*
- *Alberta cattle feeders work diligently to meet all applicable environmental standards, regulations, and requirements. In fact, cattle feeders often exceed them.*
- *The environmental commitment of cattle feeders includes following best practices in environmental management, pursuing continual improvement, and participating in research projects that lead to enhanced environmental practices and outcomes.*

Approved by the Board on: November 19, 2015

Subject to Review by: November 19, 2017