



CANADIAN
CATTLEMEN'S
ASSOCIATION

National Voice Of Cattle Producers

Statement

COVID-19 reduces North American beef processing capacity: CCA recommends implementing set-aside program

April 13, 2020

Calgary, AB

The Canadian Cattlemen's Association (CCA) is working with industry stakeholders and government to continue to supply beef and keep markets moving in these difficult times. In the last week, North American beef processing capacity has been reduced at a number of facilities due to challenges brought forth by the COVID-19 pandemic.

For Canada, this includes the Cargill processing facility in High River, Alberta, temporarily reducing shifts starting the week of April 13, 2020. This Cargill facility represents 36 per cent of total Canadian processing capacity. Other plants within Canada have also marginally reduced packing capacity to be able to implement COVID-19 protocols such as spacing of workers within the plant. These reductions in packing capacity will create challenges for Canadian beef farmers and ranchers, and additionally may have impacts at the consumer level depending on the length of interruptions.

At the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, the CCA submitted a set of [recommendations](#) to the Federal Government including changes to the Business Risk Management (BRM) programs. Additionally, within the submission was the recommendation to re-build the BSE era set-aside framework to be implemented should a critical situation, such as a significant reduction in packing capacity, arise. The CCA recognizes that we are now in a critical situation and recommends that this program be reinstated and implemented immediately to best address the array of challenges brought forward by packing capacity shortages. The CCA is in discussion with the Federal Government on our recommendations.

"We learned many lessons during the hard years of BSE, and it is time to implement the policies that previously helped us weather the storm," says Bob Lowe, President of the CCA.

The objective of a set-aside program is to delay the marketing of cattle when processing capacity isn't available. The program would be designed to encourage farmers to hold cattle on maintenance rations. This would allow cattle marketings to stretch out over a longer period of time and be managed by existing packing capacity, until slaughter capacity can be regained. The program was originally developed in concert between governments and the Canadian beef industry during the BSE era and considered successful.

"We also must look at and support all actions that can assist in our current situation. This could include increases in processing capacity at provincial packing plants and holding back cows so that we can focus slaughter on fed cattle - everything is on the table," states Lowe.

Canadian processing facilities have developed and implemented measures in consultation with public health agencies including: taking temperatures of employees before the start of work each day, additional cleaning and disinfection for high touch surfaces, monitoring of hand washing with soap and water by quality assurance

*The CCA is the national voice for Canada's beef cattle industry representing 60,000 beef farms and feedlots.
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personnel, use of a sanitizer to disinfect hands, and the requirement for employees to self-monitor and not to come to work if observable symptoms are present.

Health and food safety is paramount in all agriculture and food production operations in Canada. The above protocols are in addition to regular cleaning and sanitation.

The Canadian Food Inspection Agency (CFIA) continues to indicate that they do not anticipate any food product recalls or withdrawals from the market due to COVID-19 contamination. Currently, there have been no reported cases of food or food packaging being associated with the transmission of COVID-19.

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