



Beef cattle producers and environmental organizations team up on climate change solutions and launch new grassland initiative

October 25, 2023

Ottawa, ON - Today, the Canadian Cattle Association (CCA) together with Ducks Unlimited Canada (DUC) and the Nature Conservancy of Canada (NCC) hosted an independent pre-COP28 dialogue on climate adaptation through sustainable livestock systems. The event explored bridging the nexus of climate change and biodiversity loss through cross-cutting themes of sustainable production systems and food security as we discussed the implications of grasslands conversion and sustainable food production as we feed a growing population.

At the close of the event, our organizations were excited to highlight efforts currently underway on the Grasslands Conservation Initiative (GCI), an industry-led proposed initiative by CCA providing a multi-pronged approach to protect biodiversity, contribute to global food security and restore agricultural lands and habitats. This initiative is a leading example of the power of partnerships. By working with conservation partners like DUC, NCC, and Canada's ranching community, we can deliver solutions that ensure grasslands remain a foundation for thriving communities and contributes to Canada's biodiversity and climate goals. We must seize the opportunity to protect this valuable ecosystem by working collaboratively in a whole-of-government, whole-of-society approach.

While grasslands are one of the most threatened ecosystems in the world, they also provide key opportunities and solutions to address the dual crises of climate change and biodiversity loss. Grasslands are vital hotspots of biodiversity, offering valuable ecosystem services, providing wildlife habitat, storing carbon, supporting livestock grazing, naturally controlling crop pests, facilitating pollination, reducing erosion and flooding, and providing high-quality food. With an estimated 74 per cent of Canada's native grasslands already lost, the urgency to address this crisis cannot be overstated. We must prioritize grassland conservation to ensure the ecosystem continues providing these benefits as well as the survival of grassland-dependent species.

Much of Canada's remaining grasslands are owned or managed by livestock producers, with the majority being cattle ranchers. Sustainable ranching in Canada supports resilient landscapes and positively contributes to global climate and biodiversity goals. Grazing animals are an important function in a healthy grassland ecosystem and the absence of grazing cattle from the landscape threatens the existence of one of the world's most vulnerable ecosystems.

Heading into COP28, the global community is facing unprecedented challenges including but not limited to increased food insecurity, rapid biodiversity decline, and degradation as well as fragmentation of integral agricultural land and habitats like grasslands.

Given these have been topics of concern for the COP28 presidency, Canada will have the opportunity to lead by example. **Real** change will only come with bold, collective action to halt and reverse nature loss.



Quotes:

Canadian cattle producers are environmental leaders, stewarding the land that provides habitat and producing nutrient-dense protein for consumers at home and around the world. If we want to get serious about conserving grasslands and ensuring cattle ranchers can continue to be economically sustainable as well, we need serious collaboration, partnerships and investment, including from Government as a catalyst to support grassland conservation.

-Nathan Phinney, CCA President

Grasslands are some of the most important ecosystems in Canada. They are biodiversity hotspots and provide invaluable ecosystem services, helping natural systems and communities alike to respond to climate change. They are also one of the most threatened ecosystems in the world. Taking collective action now to advance grassland conservation will help to ensure that these critical habitats continue to support biodiversity while also mitigating the impacts of a warming climate.

– Michael Nadler, Ducks Unlimited Canada

Without active intervention, vast tracts of Canadian Prairie grasslands and the promise they hold will be lost. We need to take unprecedented action to protect this essential ecosystem and the potential loss of critical biodiversity. The only way we can do this is through collective action, where government, not-for-profits, industry, and communities work together. These kinds of collaborations are the key to ensuring a nature-positive future for us all.

-Catherine Grenier, President & CEO, Nature Conservancy of Canada

Quick Facts:

1. Grasslands

- a. Nearly 1/3 of Canada's agricultural land is grasses and forages (20 million hectares). These lands are typically unsuitable for crop production, but support grazing ruminants while maintaining wildlife habitat, grassland health and storing approximately 1.5 billion tonnes of carbon.¹
- b. In Canada, land used for beef cattle production represents 33 per cent of agricultural land and 68 per cent of wildlife habitat capacity within the agricultural landscape.²
- c. "Avoiding grassland conversion and the resulting preservation of soil carbon stocks represents the single largest opportunity in Canada" for natural climate solutions.³

2. Upcycling

- a. Food waste accounts for 8 per cent of global GHG emissions. Reducing food waste is an impactful way to reduce our carbon footprint.⁴
- b. Cattle do not compete with people for food, they make use of what is left. A global study showed that 86 per cent of livestock feed is not suitable for human consumption.⁵

3. Emissions

- a. Canadian cattle produce less than half global average of GHG emission intensity/kg of beef.

¹ Canadian Roundtable for Sustainable Beef (2016). National Beef Sustainability Assessment and Summary Report: https://crsb.ca/wp-content/uploads/2021/12/Assessment-and-Strategy_summary_report_2016.pdf (Accessed September 19, 2023)

² CRSB (2016)

³ Drever et al. (2021). Natural climate solutions for Canada. *Sci Adv.* 7 (23) <https://www.science.org/doi/10.1126/sciadv.abd6034>

⁴ Food waste's wider impact. *The Globe & Mail.* <https://www.theglobeandmail.com/business/adv/article-food-wastes-wider-impact/> (Accessed September 19, 2023)

⁵ Mottet, A., de Haan, C., Falcucci, A., Tempio, G., Opio, C. and Gerber, P., 2017. Livestock: On our plates or eating at our table? A new analysis of the feed/food debate. *Global Food Security*, 14, pp.1-8.



**Canadian
Cattle
Association**



**Ducks Unlimited
Canada**



For more information, contact:

Michelle McMullen

Communications Manager
Canadian Cattle Association
Email: mcmullenm@cattle.ca
Phone: [403-451-0931](tel:403-451-0931)

Karli Reimer

Communications and
Marketing - Agriculture
Ducks Unlimited Canada
Email: k_reimer@ducks.ca
Phone: 204-801-1211

Andrew Holland

National Media Relations Director
Nature Conservancy of Canada
Email: andrew.holland@natureconservancy.ca
Phone: 506-260-0469