

## Beef Farmers of Ontario

The impact of the global pandemic was far reaching in 2020 and presented many disruptions and challenges for so many sectors from tourism and airlines to education and manufacturing.

Unfortunately, Canada's beef industry and the agri-food sector weren't spared from impact. For Ontario's beef farmers, trouble began in the fall of 2019 with the closure of Ryding Regency and the resulted loss of federal processing capacity in the province.



The onset of the COVID-19 pandemic in March compounded that pressure for farmers. Fortunately, processing facilities in Ontario were not affected by any COVID outbreaks in the spring, but we closed the year with the temporary closure of Cargill Meat Solutions in Guelph, eastern Canada's largest federal processing facility, as a result of a number of positive COVID-19 cases among their workforce.

The pandemic forced us to adapt and find new ways to communicate, lobby and function as an association and, based on the current climate, the adapting will continue into 2021.

### Government Relations

Beef Farmers of Ontario (BFO) was actively engaged with both levels of government prior to and throughout the COVID-19 pandemic. In addition to our work with CCA, BFO worked closely with the eastern provinces to address the lack of sufficient processing capacity in eastern Canada, and to secure direct financial assistance for beef producers struggling from prolonged market losses.

In June, BFO welcomed an announcement by federal and provincial ministers regarding the creation of a cattle set-aside program for Ontario to allocate \$5 million to the beef sector to help manage potential backlogs in processing due to the COVID-19 pandemic. As previously noted, the program was triggered in early December as a result of the temporary closure of Cargill Meat Solutions in Guelph.

Provincially, BFO lobbied aggressively to increase funding for the Ontario Risk Management Program (RMP) alongside our counterparts in the grains, pork, veal, and sheep sectors. In July, the Province announced they would contribute an additional \$50 million across the RMP sectors for the 2020 program year, fulfilling in part a campaign commitment by the Conservative Party.

Federally, our focus was on business risk management programming. We continued to press government that we need to see changes to the AgriStability program. BFO believes there are a number of program-specific enhancements such as increasing the program trigger from 70 to 80 per cent and removing the Reference Margin Limit, that would address equity challenges and improve the effectiveness of the program for farmers.

Lastly, BFO was pleased to see the proclamation of provincial Bill 156, the Security from Trespass and Protecting Food Safety Act late in the year. This new legislation will help better protect farmers, their animals, livestock transporters, and the province's food supply from trespassers and extreme animal rights activists. Throughout 2020, BFO and other livestock and agriculture organizations strongly supported the development of this piece of legislation and were actively involved in the consultation process.



### Policy Review

BFO's policy department addressed policies and regulations affecting the beef sector, working with various government ministries on a number of critical files. Priority areas included CFIA's consultation on their proposed changes to the guidelines for simulated meat and poultry products, updates to the Nutrient Management Act that will lessen administrative burden on producers, improving access to veterinarians and livestock medicine in remote areas, advocating for interprovincial trade opportunities, consulting on Ontario's new animal welfare legislation, and amendments to the Ontario Immigrant Nominee Program.

### Research

BFO budgeted research funds of \$200,000 per year for three years (2020-2023). After receiving 28 letters of intent and 12 full proposals through a call for research proposals in 2020, 11 new research projects were approved to receive funding from BFO. All projects are at the University of Guelph with the exception of one funded at the Western College



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of Veterinary Medicine at the University of Saskatchewan. While the research was intended to commence once funding was approved, the pandemic has affected the start of some of the projects with summer student numbers down and work capacity and research progress limitations due to physical distancing requirements.

The new cow barn and some of the renovated pastures at the University of Guelph's research farm near Elora, Ontario are now in use, and work is nearly done on the construction of the new feedlot barn. The new feedlot barn will have capacity for 288 growing and finishing steers, which is an increase of about 96 head over the previous facilities.

### Consumer Engagement

The priorities of our consumer engagement efforts in 2020 were getting our content in-market, building relationships with influencers and partners, and continuing to build the Ontario Beef brand story with the public.

Fortunately, the vast majority of our new strategy was designed to be carried out on social media. When the pandemic hit, we made some initial pivots on our messaging and we made some minor adjustments to our campaigns with respect to some of the in-person activities that were planned, but overall, we were able to execute our digital media strategy as planned, and did so with excellent results.

We continued work on our new creative assets, which were used to support some of the virtual public-facing events we participated in during the fall/winter of 2020.

One we were anxious to release was a virtual-360 tour of a feedlot and cow-calf operation. This project was completed in partnership with Farm & Food Care Ontario and was released at the virtual Royal Agricultural Winter Fair. Our new public website continued to increase traffic steadily, our store/product locator database continued to build, and we saw fantastic growth in not only followers but, more importantly, engagement across all of our social channels.

### Market Development

The Ontario Beef Market Development (OBMD) program continues to evolve and the work by the joint BFO-Ontario Cattle Feeders' Association committee continued in 2020 despite the impact of the pandemic on travel and execution of events and programs.



**The priorities of BFO's consumer engagement efforts in 2020 were establishing creative assets, building relationships with influencers and partners, and a focusing on their digital media campaigns.**



**Throughout 2020, BFO worked closely with CCA and the eastern provinces to address the lack of sufficient processing capacity in eastern Canada, and to secure financial assistance for beef farmers struggling from prolonged market losses.**

The ability to develop new branding initiatives in Ontario was limited as packers and retailers focused on operations and the safety of their employees. In addition, we saw a massive drop in customer capacity and meal occasions in the casual dining sector, as well as in the catering sector. As a result, the committee placed a higher priority on promotion of existing Ontario beef brands at retail and advancing its quality assurance objective.

In early 2020, before the pandemic had impacted Canada, work was done to support the growth of Ontario-branded beef by participating in a number of national tradeshow, including Grocery Innovations Canada and the Restaurants Canada show, both hosted in Toronto.

In export markets, most tradeshow were cancelled including in Korea, Taiwan, Singapore and Vietnam. However, work continued in the Japanese market by providing promotional support for existing Ontario beef brands. Currently, there are 21 retail partners promoting Ontario beef in 567 outlets across Japan. We did see one program launch in Japan, which was the Ontario Heritage Angus Beef brand, a premium brand exclusive to St. Helen's Meat Packers.

As previously mentioned, the Committee focused on quality assurance programming. As a result of that work, the Ontario Corn Fed Beef Quality

Assurance program was approved as a certifying body for the Canadian Roundtable for Sustainable Beef. Now, Ontario's feedlot sector and the bulk of finished animals in the province will be well positioned to take advantage of sustainable programming.

Through this announcement, we anticipate we will see an increase in demand from the feedlot sector for VBP Plus certified calves in the cow-calf sector, especially those who are interested in participating in Cargill's Certified Sustainable Program, which is now offered at both its High River and Guelph facilities.

### Producer Engagement

BFO's producer engagement team had planned a wide range of projects in 2020, however, the pandemic took a toll on many of the planned activities. Our inaugural Feedlot Management School was to be held at the end of March, but obviously needed to be postponed to 2021.

Likewise, our Beef Youth Development program, as well as the Cow-Calf Management School planned for August, met the same fate.

Plans shifted to meeting with producers in a virtual format when possible and we focused on digital resource development.

Our bfoUP webinar series ran through the winter and spring with great uptake, we launched an article series in Ontario Beef magazine called Wellness on the Farm, which focuses on the overall wellbeing of our producers, and we developed a number of video resources on various topics for producers.

