

Manitoba Beef Producers

Adaptation was the norm for in 2020 for Manitoba Beef Producers (MBP) as the association tried to balance its usual advocacy and outreach efforts with the industry-related challenges that accompanied the COVID-19 pandemic.

In February the Manitoba government announced a grant of up to \$300,000 toward the three-year Livestock Predation Prevention Project. MBP has long advocated for such an initiative. MBP and the Manitoba Sheep Association are also providing funding toward it. Technical support is coming from other members of the Livestock Predation Protection Working Group. Some program components include conducting on-farm risk assessments, and, testing the effectiveness of lethal and non-lethal Risk Management Practices in reducing predation. A project lead has been secured (employed by MBP) and work has commenced with a survey on predation losses distributed to cattle and sheep producers in the fall for feedback.



A screen shot of the MBP newly launched website

There was considerable work related to the Manitoba government's changes to the agricultural Crown land (ACL) leasing program. Key among them were efforts to secure the first right of renewal on ACL forage leases issued prior to October 1, 2019, something not permitted when the program changes were first announced. This key change has been achieved. While the continuation of legacy (family) leases is also confirmed, the government has ended unit transfers, i.e. the ability to transfer leases with the sale of deeded land. Advocacy continues on this and other ACL concerns, including: the need for a transition period to allow lease holders to adapt to a steep hike in rental rates; the importance of informed access; the new process for valuing lease hold improvements; and, valuing ecosystem services provided by lease holders in managing ACL.

In mid-June the findings of a review of forage insurance programs offered by the Manitoba Agricultural Services Corporation (MASC) were released. MBP sought the review due to producer concerns about gaps or challenges with existing forage insurance offerings that limit their responsiveness. MASC is exploring action on several of the report's recommendations, including: new methodologies to assign coverages to new insureds; determining if the effect that disaster years have on future coverage can be minimized; establishing insured values that better reflect the price of hay in claim years; and, reviewing the index-based insurance approach used in other jurisdictions which rely on weather or satellite-based technology.

Acting upon requests from MBP, MASC announced that extended grazing forages would be made eligible for wildlife damage compensation. This compensation is limited to 45 per cent of the value of loss on swathed or baled crops or forage, and suitable standing annual crops (e.g. corn) that are intended for grazing.

MBP has undertaken considerable work related to the pandemic, both on its own and in collaboration with national and provincial cattle organizations, the Manitoba Livestock Marketing Association and others. Due to the steep spike in premiums for the Western Livestock Price Insurance Program (WLPIP), MBP asked the federal and provincial governments to cost share the premiums with producers, as well as to extend the enrolment deadline. While the deadline to enroll in the calf program was extended in Manitoba, there was no movement for cost-shared premiums. MBP continues to provide input into ways to enhance WLPIP and to make price insurance available in other regions of Canada.

MBP also advocated with the Manitoba government to provide its 40 per cent contribution toward a set-aside program as per the AgriRecovery initiative announced by the federal government on May 5. The 2020 Canada-Manitoba Finished Cattle Feed Assistance Program was announced in mid-October. While the Manitoba government agreed to administer it, it did not provide its 40 per cent contribution. MBP requested adjustments to the program to address eligibility concerns such as: whether the eligible slaughter date could be extended; questions about the minimum weight requirements; and, the requirements for a proof of slaughter date as opposed to a shipment date.

In other advocacy efforts at the provincial level, MBP has long sought changes to AgriStability to make the program more responsive. The efforts redoubled when the federal government announced proposed changes to it in late November. MBP participated in provincial government consultations related to possible changes to trespassing and biosecurity legislation. Some of this discussion has arisen due to continued concerns about the impact of crime on the agriculture sector and rural communities. And, MBP has been providing feedback as the Manitoba government continues to envision and action its Manitoba Protein Advantage strategy.



Taken in January 2020 in Brandon, MB during a social event after our Young Producers Retreat.

There were some weather-related challenges in 2020. MBP asked the Manitoba government to allow Wildlife Management Areas to be made available for haying and grazing in areas where producers were facing dry conditions. In mid-July the Province agreed to do this. Although there was inadequate moisture in some regions, excess moisture was at times a problem in others. Strong storms arrived in southeastern Manitoba in early June, leading to overland flooding and associated damages. Heavy rains also appeared in early July in southwestern to central Manitoba, again leading to overland flooding, road damage, some evacuations of livestock, and crop damage. Drier conditions returned thereafter, but timely rains allowed most producers to secure adequate feed supplies heading into winter. Some producers however closed the year concerned about low dugout and well levels, and how low soil moisture conditions may affect production in 2021.



During the District 5 meeting in October 2020, when Director Steven Manns joined MBP General Manager Carson Callum for the virtual meeting.

The pandemic has and continues to lead to the cancellation of numerous public-facing events in which MBP normally participates, such as the Royal Manitoba Winter Fair, the Red River Ex, Ag in the City, Open Farm

Days, Amazing Ag Adventure and Ag Days. However, MBP forged ahead with communications activities. This included running morning advertisements on CTV Winnipeg promoting Manitoba's beef industry. MBP participated in a live interview on CTV Morning Live to talk about beef production, as well as the nutritional attributes of beef. Summer and Christmas/New Year's radio campaigns targeted listeners in Winnipeg and area. MBP produced a video for social media thanking those working on the front lines in the processing plants for their efforts. In December MBP completed a refresh of its website to make it more user friendly and inviting, both for producers and for the general public. And, MBP participated in the 31st season of Great Tastes of Manitoba, a popular cooking show on CTV Winnipeg. A video profiling one of our director's operations also aired during the broadcast, helping make the farm to table connection for viewers.

Due to the pandemic, MBP had to forgo its usual process of holding 14 in person fall district meetings, opting for a virtual platform. The same approach will be taken for MBP's 42nd Annual General Meeting in February.

In closing, MBP appreciates the ongoing collaborative efforts between the various industry associations and other value chain members to help the sector respond to the various challenges arising as a result of the pandemic. This includes the timely development of informational resources for holding auction sales and processing cattle. Key too are advocacy efforts targeted at government and elected officials outlining the challenges for the sector and the tools and strategies needed to help the beef industry move through and beyond the pandemic. This level of cooperation has been invaluable.

For more information, please visit MBP's website at www.mbbeef.ca



On set in July 2020 during filming for the 31st season of Great Tastes of Manitoba (MBP had two episodes this year).