

## Public and Stakeholder Engagement

Like most of the other divisions of CCA, the Public and Stakeholder Engagement (PSE) team had to be flexible and able to pivot plans in 2020. Although the adversities experienced throughout the year challenged the industry, we have also seen tremendous gains in public trust for the food system overall.

Annual research from the Canadian Centre for Food Integrity (CCFI), showed an incredible 12-point gain in trust over the year previous, concluding that “Canadians are confident in and optimistic about the food they eat and those who produce it” (CCFI 2020). This demonstrates clearly how crisis situations can also present great opportunities to foster trust through our response.

Structural and staff changes to the program this year included the finalization of governance structure which saw outgoing CCA President, David Haywood-Farmer, joining the program as the first PSE Chair. Haywood-Farmer will serve a two-year term in the position and act as a strategic advisor for the Stakeholder Engagement (SE) Manager. Staff changes in early March left a team of only two to manage through the first wave of the COVID-19 pandemic. In late October, Lynsay Beavers joined the team as SE Specialist, bringing a wealth of knowledge from her career in communications and extension in the dairy sector. With Domonique Anderson celebrating the arrival of her first baby, current master’s student Sydney Fortier has accepted a one-year contract to fulfill the role of SE Technical Advisor.

### COVID-19 Response

As COVID-19 was declared a pandemic, PSE became part of the media relations team for crisis response. This included assisting with industry statements, news releases, selecting spokespersons and prepping with key messages. Virtual media scrums were created to maximize spokesperson time with multiple media requests and online town halls were developed to keep stakeholders aware of industry updates. Campaigns to express gratitude to frontline workers were created with Canada Beef and provincial association partners, including a video with participation from producers across the country.

### Issues Management

An investment in the media tracking platform Meltwater early in the year allowed for refined media tracking, calculating reach of negative articles, and following emerging trends. During COVID-19, the team monitored online narratives attempting to link intensive feeding operations with zoonotic disease outbreaks. When this was supported in a CBC e-newsletter, PSE collaborated with veterinarians at the Western College of Veterinary Medicine and the University of Calgary Faculty of Veterinary Medicine to develop a response and create media statements for future use. In early 2020, responses were developed with Canada Beef for publications advocating diet changes for the new year, which resulted in a letter to *Chatelaine* being published in the magazine. Other trends included messaging about reduced environmental impacts of blended

beef products. Meetings were held with members of Maple Leaf’s senior management, in partnership with the Canadian Pork Council, to discuss how future campaigns could focus on the benefits of both plant and animal proteins in blended products.

In July, Burger King launched a campaign announcing an open source solution to methane emissions from cows. Unfortunately, the video focused on bovine flatulence instead of belching and the solution proposed was based on trials demonstrating mixed results. PSE developed key messages that were shared with National Cattlemen’s Beef Association and utilized by the Global Roundtable for Sustainable Beef (GRSB) in discussions with Burger King marketing executives. The result was an apology letter from Burger King and edits to the original campaign video. PSE also worked with the GRSB on a letter to the United Nations (UN) following a tweet advising a reduction in meat consumption. In response, the tweet was deleted and meetings between the two organizations are being planned.



### Consumer Research

Planned public perception research went ahead in July 2020 to provide bench line data to inform the strategic direction of the PSE program’s proactive content. This research found that most Canadians have positive impressions of the industry and support its’ role in providing high quality food and contributing to the economy. Challenges included less support for the industry from an environmental perspective, which was felt most strongly in the millennial demographic and particularly from females. However, key messages about environmental benefits of cattle production were effective in increasing positive sentiment towards the industry in all age categories. Other highlights included



to have aligned messaging in a complimentary initiative, but specific to the beef industry. Called 'Leave Something Behind', this included a series of producer videos that emphasized how farmers and ranchers are working to leave the land and environment better than they found it, for the next generation of beef producers and Canadians. This was complimented by two special media presentations, the first focusing on the risks to

young producers because of COVID-19 impacts, which included Young Cattlemen's Council members. The second, hosted with CRSB, focused on potential risks to native grasslands with guests from Dalhousie University, DUC, NCC and Birds Canada. This campaign was also awarded best Crisis Communications and Issue Management at the Canadian Agri-Marketing Awards.

Guardians of the Grasslands continued to see film festival success throughout the year. Worth noting was that many of the festivals had an environmental focus in target urban areas including Elements Environmental in Vancouver, the 'Caring for the Climate' series in Oakville and the Wildlife Conservation festival held in Los Angeles and New York. Although unfortunate that most festivals were online events due to COVID-19 restrictions, the film continued to reach audiences in large urban centres including Montreal, Toronto and Ottawa. It also drew the attention of the Narwhal, a publication based in Vancouver that focuses primarily on environmental issues. In their article, "Meet the People Saving Canada's Grasslands," two of the film's participants were interviewed and provided their perspective of the role of ranching in grassland preservation.

One of the largest public outreach initiatives was hosted at the Royal Agricultural Winter Fair, based in Toronto. Jill Harvie, beef producer and host of Food Careers podcast, interviewed Steve Lee about how his perceptions changed through in-person visits to farms and ranches across Canada. In the discussion, Lee talks openly of how he went from thinking the beef industry was disastrous for the environment to learning about carbon sequestration and native grasslands preservation as part of stewardship practices. When asked how he perceives the beef industry now, Lee responded, "it's not (just) environmentally friendly; it goes way beyond that. Ranching is really a form of stewardship that happens to involve cattle."

The PSE program looks to continue providing value to stakeholders through strategic issue response, coordinated both on a national and global level, to both mitigate negative attention and build opportunities for positive media stories. Fostering existing partnerships and continually seeking new potential relationships, especially those that focus on education and environment, will continue to be a priority. The development of proactive content will focus on positioning the industry as a leader in environmental stewardship, nature-based climate solutions and integral to the overall Canadian food system.

an overwhelming 70 per cent of millennials that are interested to know more about the beef industry, presenting an incredible opportunity for engagement and building trust.

**Partnerships**

Although still a new division of CCA, PSE has demonstrated its value to industry through fostering collaborations, partnerships and synergies across Canada and beyond. This includes a continued membership with the Canadian Centre for Food Integrity and increased engagement with Steve Lee, formerly of the 3% project and now a policy advisor to the UN. The Simpson Centre at the University of Calgary was up and running early in the year and hosted an entire series of webinars, many of which focused on the beef industry specifically. Amie Peck, previously on the GRSB communications council took on the role as Chair which will allow for closer alignment between Canadian communications and issue management perspectives with a global reach.

**Public Outreach**

One of the most important aspects of the PSE program, Public Outreach, had to be especially nimble in 2020 with the cancellation of in-person events. This included positioning content for virtual events, such as the Earth Day presentation of Guardians of the Grasslands hosted in partnership with Ducks Unlimited Canada (DUC) and the Nature Conservancy of Canada (NCC) which saw an incredible attendance of over 150 people.

As CCA partnered with the Canadian Federation of Agriculture on their 'Food for Thought campaign', the PSE program identified an opportunity