

# GRASS ROUTES



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FOR MORE INFORMATION

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## LEADERS NEEDED

Alberta Beef Producers (ABP) is proud to be a grass roots producer organization. We are an organization of producers, led by producers, speaking and working on behalf of cattle and beef producers in Alberta. Our staff members see themselves working for the farmers and ranchers who are the foundation of the long history and rich legacy of the cattle and beef industry in this province.

As a producer organization, our first priority is making sure that we speak and work as effectively as possible on behalf of Alberta cattle and beef producers. We are similar to all other grass roots organizations in the way that our effectiveness is very much influenced by the quality of the producers who become our leaders. The producers who are elected as ABP delegates provide leadership to the organization and a critical connection to the grass roots producers in their respective zones. Those delegates who are elected to the ABP Board of Directors use their contacts with local producers and their knowledge of the industry to set the strategic direction for ABP.

We need good leaders for our organization and this is the time of year when we are accepting nominations for delegates to run in the 2015 fall elections. Producers in each of the nine geographic zones in the province can elect up to five delegates and one Cattle Feeder Council delegate to serve two-year terms. In order to ensure continuity and experience in our delegate body, delegate elections are staggered and this year, there are three delegate positions open for election in each zone and Cattle Feeder Council positions open for election in zones 1, 3, 5, 7 and 9.

ABP is a democratic and representative organization and our delegates are the foundation of that representation. Clearly, one of the most important roles for delegates is the connection to grass roots producers. Delegates need to hear the concerns and issues of local producers and bring these forward to ABP so that they can be addressed. It is also important for delegates to make grass roots producers aware of the priorities and activities that ABP and our partner organizations are pursuing on behalf of producers. We are funded by check-off dollars from producers and you need to see value for that investment if you are going to continue supporting ABP.

Being an ABP delegate is not financially rewarding, but we do try to offset some of the costs associated with participation in an industry organization. There is significant satisfaction in making a meaningful contribution to your industry and the rewarding experience of working with the dedicated and knowledgeable producers who are true industry leaders. Delegates also have opportunities to serve on ABP committees and councils, become ABP directors, or represent ABP on the boards of our partner organizations such as the Canadian Cattlemen's Association and Canada Beef.

Producers who want to become ABP delegates can find nomination forms at the back of this newsletter, on the ABP website, or by calling the ABP office. Nominations must be submitted to the ABP office by August 31, 2015. Please consider being a leader. ▼



**RICH SMITH**  
Executive Director

# ADAPTATION

Charles Darwin’s work on evolutionary theory has often been described by the phrase: It is not the strongest of the species that survive nor the most intelligent, but those that are most adaptive to change. The theme of the Alberta Beef Producers (ABP) Annual Report last year was A Year of Change and the first half of this year has certainly tested the ability of cattle producers and ABP to adapt to change. We have seen changes in the weather, changes in our government, and changes in our organization.

After several years of generally good moisture conditions in Alberta, many producers across Western Canada are facing severe drought conditions. From April 1 to July 21, 60 percent of the prairie agricultural landscape has received very low to record low precipitation. ABP has been talking with the Agriculture Financial Services Corporation to ensure that producers are able to use insured forage or annual crops for grazing and feed supplies. Drought is a regular occurrence on the Canadian prairies, but record low precipitation is a new and formidable challenge.

We welcome the announcement from the federal government that producers will be able to defer a portion of sales proceeds on breeding livestock for one year in order to help replenish their herd in the following year. Selling breeding animals is a last resort for most producers after they have exhausted all other options for feeding these animals, but the tax deferral can help these producers rebuild their herds. If we want to retain the

cattle feeding and beef processing infrastructure we currently have in Alberta we need to have more cows, not further declines in our herd.

One change that is affecting all Albertans is the decision by the voters to end almost 44 years of PC governments and elect an NDP government. With 70 new MLAs in the legislature and inexperienced cabinet ministers tackling expanded portfolios, ABP joins many other organizations in uncharted territory with the new government. We have had several good meetings with the new Minister of Agriculture and Forestry and we are pleased that the government has retained the senior Agriculture and Forestry staff members with whom we already have good relationships. We will continue to pursue opportunities to work collaboratively with the government to address the issues of importance to cattle and beef producers.

We are expecting legislative and policy changes from the new provincial government. One area where change almost certainly will occur is farm and ranch health and safety. Alberta is the only province in Canada where farm and ranch workers are not covered by Occupational Health and Safety (OHS) legislation. ABP and our colleagues in the livestock sector have recognized that this is not a tenable situation for the government, public or our industry.

We are prepared to accept farm and ranch workers coming under the Occupational Health and Safety Act. This would create an obligation for farms and ranches to provide safe and healthy workplaces and would allow OHS staff to investigate fatalities and serious incidents that occur on farms and ranches. The majority of farmers and ranchers already provide safe and healthy workplaces and they recognize the need for investigation of fatalities. We will be seeking time to work with the government on the development of appropriate safe and reasonably practicable industry practices that

would become part of the code and regulations applied to farms and ranches.

In the face of the challenges created by these substantive changes, ABP has been working on the priorities that were identified by producers during our Plan Review last year and by our Board of Directors this spring. We have completed the regulation and by-law amendments that were approved at our Annual General Meeting last December and we will be convening the new Cattle Industry Leaders Forum this fall. We are developing a government relations strategy and will be engaging a contractor or staff member to increase our level of contact and influence with elected and senior government officials.

We are continuing discussions with industry organizations and governments to address the funding challenges that ABP and our partners face, both provincially and nationally. ABP is taking a leadership role in sustainability and a number of our board members and delegates are participating in the McDonald’s Verified Sustainable Beef Canadian pilot project. We will be working with the new government to protect the land and water rights and interests of cattle and beef producers and address the impacts of wildlife on beef producers. As always, we are focused on improving consumer perceptions of beef and beef producers, as well as enhancing our engagement with grass roots producers.

Cattle and beef producers have survived drought, market closures, and economic challenges by being adaptive to change. We believe that producers will continue to adapt and ABP is committed to being equally adaptive. 🍷

# WCCCS FINAL RESULTS

*This content was developed by BCRC in collaboration with Kathy Larson, MSc, PAg, Beef Economist with the Western Beef Development Centre.*

Herd productivity is closely linked to herd profitability. The calculation for break-even price on calves clearly demonstrates this:

$$\text{Breakeven Calf Price} = \frac{\text{Total Cow Herd Costs}}{\text{Total Lbs of Calf Weaned}}$$

The break-even price can be lowered by decreasing total cow herd costs or by increasing the total pounds of calves weaned. Increasing the total weight (lbs) of weaned calves can be achieved by improving herd productivity, such as:

- INCREASING – conception rates, weaning rate, etc.
- DECREASING – calf death loss, calving span, etc.

While it is good management to track and calculate one's herd production performance indicators on an annual basis, it can be helpful to have benchmarks to compare to. Benchmarks help a producer know if they are on the right track. They can help a producer identify if they excel in a certain area and/or could improve in another. They can also help to show what production and management practices other producers are following. Benchmark productivity measures for the cow-calf sector can also help guide research and extension efforts.

A group of individuals from BC to Manitoba, representing provincial beef producer groups, provincial Ministry of Agriculture specialists, BCRC, Canfax and the Western Beef Development Centre have revived, expanded and conducted a survey last completed in Alberta in 1998.

The Western Canadian Cow-Calf Survey (WCCCS) was distributed to producers from November 2014 until the end of February 2015. A total of 411 survey responses were received (representing just over 76,000 cows).

Response rates varied by province with the greatest percentage of respondents being from AB (49%), followed by SK (24%), MB (18%) and BC (8%). The average age of survey respondents was 50 with an average of 28 years in the business.

Survey respondents provided details on their 2014 calf crop starting with the 2013 breeding season and ending with weaning. Cow:bull ratio averaged 25:1 and breeding season length averaged 93 days, which was nearly unchanged from the results of the 1998 Alberta survey. A breeding season no longer than 63 days is recommended to maintain a 365-day calving interval and improve calf crop uniformity, but only 24 percent of respondents achieved this recommended target.

Breeding heifers four to six weeks before the cows is recommended so that heifers have more time to recoup (i.e. longer post partum interval) after their first calf is born. Only 26 percent of survey respondents bred their heifers earlier than the rest of the herd, averaging two weeks earlier.

The average open rate was seven percent in cows and 10 percent in heifers. The conception rate for all females was 92.8 percent, compared to 95.6 percent in 1998. Work is underway within the industry to gain a better understanding of recent years' lower conception rates.

The most popular month for calving start was March, with 18 percent starting calving in the first half of the month and 18 percent starting in the second half of March. This is a change from 1998, where the majority of respondents were calving in February. This shift in calving start dates suggests the research and extension about calving later to avoid the high cost of calving during winter months was heard and adopted.

Calving distribution is an important indicator for a herd. Ideally, 60 percent or more of females should be calving in the first 21 days of the calving season. A little more than 40 percent of question respondents achieved this target. On average 55

percent of females calved in the first 21 days, which is an improvement from 48 percent reported in 1998.

Nearly 80 percent of respondents provided details on 2014 weaning dates. Most respondents weaned in October (41%), or November (32%). The most common method for weaning was traditional separation (70%), others using low-stress fenceline (22%), two-stage/nose paddle (6%) or natural (3%) methods. The average wean percentage was 86 percent, with 533 lbs weaned per cow exposed, 28 lbs higher than in 1998. Only 24 percent of respondents implanted their 2014 calves.

More than 69 percent of respondents report having more than 90 percent polled calves. Ninety-four percent of producers castrate calves before six months of age, indicating the majority of producers are already aligned with the beef Code of Practice requirement (to be effective Jan. 1, 2018) of using pain control when castrating bulls older than six months of age.

Over 70 percent of respondents sold a portion of their calves at weaning, with nine percent preconditioning and 35 percent backgrounding. Some producers used multiple calf marketing strategies. Most respondents (80%) marketed calves via live auction, 12 percent sold calves direct/private treaty, nine percent used electronic auction and seven percent used an order buyer.

The top four bull selection criteria were breed, conformation, birth weight and EPDs, respectively. Genetic test results ranked #9 in bull selection. Few respondents test their bulls for trich (12%) and vibrio (10%).

Nineteen percent of respondents regularly body condition score their females and 91 percent vaccinate. Forty-seven percent lab test their winter feed for quality, and 80 percent of those use the results to balance rations.

For the full findings please visit: [www.wbdc.sk.ca/wcccs.htm](http://www.wbdc.sk.ca/wcccs.htm). Ideally this survey will be conducted every five years. ▼



FRED HAYS  
Policy Analyst

# COMPARING BEEF WITH CATTLE PRICES

A reporter asks the question about how the drought may affect the price of beef: Is this weather having an affect on what we are paying for steaks and roasts? There is no short answer. Retail beef pricing includes a multitude of inputs such as the price of finished cattle, processor costs, competitiveness of other proteins, the time of year, feeder cattle availability and costs, fed cattle numbers available to the packer, mix of slaughter steers and heifers, export cattle and beef volumes, restrictions such as COOL, amount of imports, tariffs, and probably a number of others in the mix.

We know that the present retail beef prices are comparatively high. Are consumers going to continue buying steaks or are they going to back off for smaller portions, cheaper cuts, or pork or chicken?

The beef business has gone through some tough times including BSE and COOL. The industry has ramped up the sales through sector promotions, improving quality and marketing efforts through Alberta Beef Producers and Canada Beef. The major packers push for profitability for their companies as well.

Beef and cattle values were assessed from the year 2000 to April 2015 using Statistics Canada monthly values. Cattle prices for Statistics Canada for each province are readily available from the market place, and beef cut prices are

obtained monthly from homeowner surveys for the country. These are shown to be statistically reliable within a certain small range.

An assessment was done using these monthly values for slaughter steers in Alberta and for sirloin steak as a representative beef cut. Ground beef was also used. The monthly comparison of Alberta



averaged by slaughter beef prices and sirloin beef prices are shown in the first figure.

Prior to 2003, and BSE, fed cattle were trading around \$90 to \$105 cash per hundred; sirloin was \$12 to \$14 per kilogram. After BSE in 2003, slaughter steer prices decreased to around \$70 to \$80 for a long period gradually increasing to \$95 to \$100 by January 2011. Presently fed steers are trading at \$200 or more.

Presently average sirloin steaks are selling at \$23 to \$25 per kilogram reflecting an increase mirroring the fed steer price. Without any statistical comparison the first figure shows the sirloin price increasing with steer prices. The question however, how does this relate to cattle prices?

The second figure shows the comparison of slaughter steer prices with sirloin prices from January 2000 to April 2015. The dates are shown in the figure to give some context to price ranges. When steer prices were in the \$75 to \$125 range sirloin prices were selling at \$13 to \$17 per kilogram. During this cattle price range there was a considerable amount of variability relating beef to

cattle pricing. After fed steer prices went to \$225 and beyond the sirloin prices were more closely aligned with overall cattle prices.

This can be assessed with a statistical correlation coefficient analysis, that indicates how closely two variables are related to each other, of the two as shown in the first table. For the entire period from January 2000 to April 2015 the correlation of sirloin steak prices compared with steer prices was about 80 percent. That is, for this 15-year period steak prices on average were based around 80 percent of steer prices. But as shown in the second figure there was a period at the low end with considerable sirloin price variability.

Steer values were used from January 2000 to a time when they were selling for \$100 or more. This happened to be in January 2011. The correlation of pricing during this period was only 22 percent (first grouping in the second figure) and almost 80 percent of the sirloin steak pricing was unrelated to steer pricing. From February 2011 to April 2015 the steer prices continued to increase, as did the sirloin steak prices. During this period the correlation of the two was 95 percent (second grouping in the second figure). Although not necessarily cause and effect, 95 percent of the steak prices were related with slaughter steer prices. Other variables were also looked at during these same periods shown in table 2.

*Continued on page 6...*



# BODYCONDITION SCORING.CA

Want improved weaning weights? What about better conception rates? Or healthier calves? Getting your cows in ideal condition may be the ticket, but knowing what “ideal” is, and measuring how much fat cover your cows really have (you’d be surprised at how wrong you can be when eyeballing) is key before planning a feeding program.

Reproduction is five times more important than growth rate and 10 times more important than carcass quality when it comes to profit. Thin cows are only half as productive as those in optimum condition.

Cows with an ideal year-round body condition score (BCS) of 2.5-3 will have a reduced calving interval, have healthier calves (due to increased passive immunity and overall milk production), have fewer calving problems, and will rebreed sooner – resulting in a more uniform calf crop with higher weaning weights. Every missed cycle represents a 42 lb loss in weaning weight.

Visit [www.bodyconditionscoring.ca](http://www.bodyconditionscoring.ca) to view a video of how to hands-on body condition score when you process this fall, play with interactive tools like the BCS vs. profit slider and feed cost calculator, and read fact sheets about how to use BCS as an easy, low cost management tool in your program that leads to bigger calf cheques.

If you have slow internet, you can request a free USB stick with all of the website tools by e-mailing [info@beefresearch.ca](mailto:info@beefresearch.ca), calling 403-275-8558 Ext. 302, or by getting in touch with Karin at the ABP office. ▼

# LETHBRIDGE COLLEGE AG BRM PROGRAM

Agriculture Business Risk Management is right for you if you are an agricultural operator who desires a better understanding of the fluidity of your commodity pricing or the areas of financial risk and opportunity in your operation; an aspiring agricultural entrepreneur; a farm successor who wants to be ready for the challenge. Or perhaps a lender, salesperson or government employee who requires an in-depth understanding of the financial risk inherent in agribusiness.

Developed in collaboration with industry experts, Agriculture Business Risk Management (AgBRM) is the practice of identifying, analyzing and managing the various potential risks and opportunities to achieve the goals of a business. This program is designed specifically for application in agricultural business with a strong focus on commodity and risk management essential to entrepreneurs. The scope of the program is limited to financial risk and areas associated with financial risk.

You will develop your knowledge and skills in the area of agricultural markets, supply and demand and the national and international policies and events that influence those markets. Your personal communication and management skills will be developed for the purpose of functioning effectively as

a team member or business leader. The advanced courses will provide you with the opportunity to apply these skills in an integrated and authentic manner by composing a business plan and/or evaluating the market equity in a given agricultural operation at a specific point in time.

At the end of the program you will have strong technical skills in currency, market trading and other risk management tools available to agriculture. You will also have an in-depth understanding of how current government trade policies and national and international events effect your commodity. Your well-developed communication and management skills will allow you to effectively apply your technical skills with proficiency in the agribusiness community. A capstone course will allow you to put all you have learned into practice to demonstrate that you are well prepared and ready for the challenges of risk management in agriculture.

This program will benefit those already in the agriculture industry and who wish to learn more about the business side of operations. It is also useful to those seeking to enter into careers in agribusiness, either as an employee, an advisor, or to open their own business.

The program is open to anyone with an interest in agribusiness. Although not essential, a grade 12 level of English and math will be of benefit for most courses. For the statistics course, grade 12 math is essential for success.

For further information and enrolment details, check out [www.lethbridgecollege.ca/brm](http://www.lethbridgecollege.ca/brm). ▼

**Don't forget to fill out the delegate nomination form on the back page and send it in before August 31, 2015. Start making a difference in your industry.**

**Table 1. Correlation of sirloin beef prices with fed steer pricing\*.**

Period	Correlation
Jan 2000 to April 2015 (just about 15 years)	0.79
June 2003-Jan 2011 (up to \$100 for steers)	0.22
Feb 2011-Apr 2014 (from \$100 to \$225 for steers)	0.95

\* Correlation coefficients were determined using Excel spreadsheet computations.

During the over 14-year period there were good correlations between the variables shown. For example, slaughter cow and ground beef price changes were 84 percent correlated, but it was also 80 percent correlated with fed steer price. Slaughter cows were 94 percent correlated with steer prices. There was also a good relationship of pork chop to sirloin pricing changes at almost 90 percent.

During the highly variable period with fed cattle below \$100 there was less of a relationship with ground beef and steer price, and pork price with sirloin. Of interest was the feeder steer price with slaughter steer price – highly variable of a relationship during that period. When the steer prices started to increase in February 2011 almost everything else came in line as well. Ground beef was more valuable with 97 percent of a relationship to sirloin. This also brought the slaughter cow price in line. Is this a cause with effect?

Back to the question of drought and beef prices: are they aligned?

At the present time during the short-term, probably not. As the BBQ season comes to an end the demand for prime cut beef will begin to subside. At a 95 percent correlation the price of fed steers

will probably follow. For a \$10 fed cattle cash decrease (eq., \$190 to \$180 per cwt) could be a one to three percent decrease in retail prime beef price. Sirloin selling at \$24 per kg would be expected to move to \$23.

Over the longer term with decreased cow numbers and feeders, and with increased feed costs, fed cattle prices will be retained, or even increase slightly putting pressure to increase beef prices. An increase of \$20 for fed cattle would increase beef price by two to five percent, based on a 95 percent correlation. But with this more product will probably move south. Then there is the continuation of low oil prices, the USD/CAD exchange rate and eliminating COOL. There will probably be more impact from these factors than from the drought. ▼

## ABP INCREASING ONLINE PRESENCE

ABP is always in the process of building our e-mail contacts and providing producers with better access to industry information.

You can sign up for our weekly news updates on our website at [www.albertabeef.org/page/news/](http://www.albertabeef.org/page/news/) or by contacting [katelynl@albertabeef.org](mailto:katelynl@albertabeef.org).

Providing us with your e-mail will keep you up-to-date on current industry news, issues and events, and reduce producer check-off dollars spent on printing costs associated with publications like this one.

ABP is on twitter and you can find us [@albertabeef](https://twitter.com/albertabeef). Our twitter account keeps you up to speed with things going on in the industry as well as a look at the consumer side of things. With almost 3,500 followers and growing, our twitter account has a great community of ag-minded people constantly sharing information.

You can also find us on facebook at [www.facebook.com/ABBeefProducers/](http://www.facebook.com/ABBeefProducers/). ▼

**Table 2. Correlation coefficient values of various food and livestock prices. Prices are monthly averages for each.**

	Slaughter cows to ground beef	Ground beef to steer price	Ground beef to sirloin	Slaughter cows to steers	Feeder steers to slaughter steer	Pork chops to sirloin steak
Jan 2000 to April 2015	0.84	0.79	0.93	0.94	0.93	0.87
June 2003-Jan 2011	0.84	0.36	0.52	0.58	0.34	0.19
Feb 2011-Apr 2014	0.94	0.97	0.97	0.96	0.97	0.95

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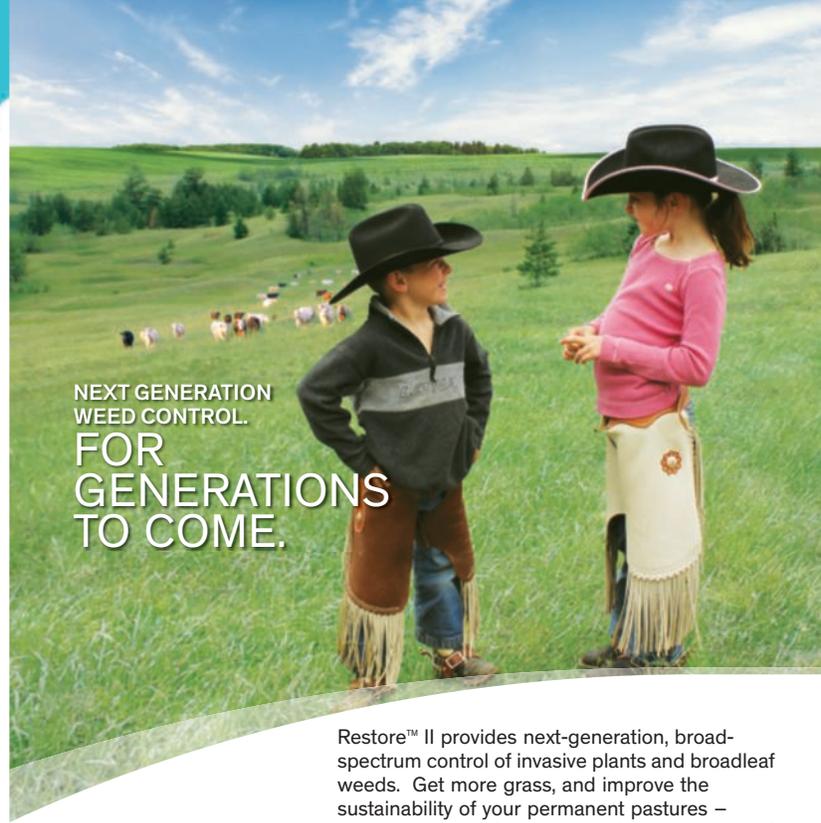
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**2015 ALBERTA BEEF PRODUCERS DELEGATE NOMINATION FORM**

Please indicate: **ZONE DELEGATE**  or **CFC ZONE DELEGATE**  for **Zone Number** \_\_\_\_\_

By providing the information requested on the nomination form, the nominator and the nominee consent to the Alberta Beef Producers collecting, using and disclosing the personal information on this form for all purposes related to the election process, including publication in the annual report, and for the business of the Alberta Beef Producers. For information about Alberta Beef Producers Personal Information Protection Policy, please contact Laura Procnier at Alberta Beef Producers.

I hereby nominate: (please print – ABP will not be responsible for misspelt names if they are illegible)

Name \_\_\_\_\_  
Address \_\_\_\_\_  
City/Town \_\_\_\_\_ Postal Code \_\_\_\_\_  
County, Municipality, I.D. or Special Area \_\_\_\_\_  
Legal Land Location \_\_\_\_\_ of Sec \_\_\_\_\_ Twp \_\_\_\_\_ Rge \_\_\_\_\_ W of \_\_\_\_\_ Meridian  
Phone Number \_\_\_\_\_ Fax Number \_\_\_\_\_ Cell Number \_\_\_\_\_  
E-mail \_\_\_\_\_  
Type of Operation: Cow/Calf  Backgrounder  Feedlot  Other: \_\_\_\_\_

Nominated by:

Name \_\_\_\_\_ Address \_\_\_\_\_  
Phone Number \_\_\_\_\_

I hereby declare to be an \*eligible producer. Signed \_\_\_\_\_  
(NOMINATOR)

Acceptance:

I hereby accept this nomination and declare that I am an \*eligible producer:

Signed \_\_\_\_\_  
(NOMINEE)

\*Eligible producer:

- "Eligible producer" means a producer resident in Alberta who has, during 2014 or 2015, sold cattle and paid a service charge to the Alberta Beef Producers or to another person on behalf of the Alberta Beef Producers. ABP reserves the right to verify your eligiblity at any time.
- An "eligible producer" that is a corporation may appoint a representative to act on its behalf.
- An "eligible producer" who is an individual cannot appoint a representative.
- The "eligible producer" must be a producer in the zone in which they or their representative are standing for election.

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**Alberta Beef Producers**  
**Attn: Laura Procnier**  
165, 6815 - 8th Street N. E. Phone: (403) 275-4400  
Calgary, Alberta T2E 7H7 Fax: (403) 274-0007

**Please note nominations must be in the ABP office by August 31, 2015**

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[www.albertabeef.org](http://www.albertabeef.org)

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