



ALBERTA BEEF PRODUCERS ELECTION BRIEFING NOTE- Updated March 29, 2019

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Grazing Leases and Grazing Lease Rental Rates

Grazing on Public Lands

Rangelands, which include grasslands and forest areas used for grazing, are the foundation of the province's cattle and beef industry and grazing on Crown land under agricultural dispositions is an integral part of our industry. Grazing leases are a fundamental component of a Crown land use strategy that provides benefits to the people of Alberta and the leaseholders while maintaining our province's rangelands as functional, working landscapes. Our objectives for functional rangelands are that these lands support efficient and economical cattle production while also meeting the environmental and social objectives of Albertans for protecting land, water, plants, and animals.

Security of tenure on both private and public lands is essential for maintaining or improving health of the grazing lands. On most Crown lands under agricultural disposition, the leaseholders have relatively secure tenure. This security of tenure provides a strong incentive for leaseholders to manage the land sustainably. Secure tenure and sound oversight by Alberta Environment and Parks staff are key reasons why the land, water, and biodiversity on these lands are in good health. Secure tenure for grazing dispositions serves Albertans and leaseholders well and does not preclude the use of the land for other compatible activities or land uses.

ABP recognizes Canada's commitments to the UN Convention on Biological Diversity to achieve targets of 17% of land conserved for biodiversity in Canada by 2020, where Alberta can play an important role in achieving these targets. However, while parks (like the Castle and Bighorn, for example), could contribute to this goal, they are not the only way to conserve lands. Under UN guidelines for *Other Effective Conservation Measures (OECMs)*, we believe that public lands under grazing dispositions that are healthy and well managed for stewardship will be able to contribute greatly to the 17% without the necessity of becoming protected parks. If grazing dispositions are accepted as contributing to this target, this recognition will also support our interest in valuing the ecosystem services that raising cattle provides such as clean water, abundant wildlife, and carbon sequestration. In addition, this will help build public trust by demonstrating how raising livestock can play a very significant role in environmental sustainability and health.

Modernizing the Grazing Rental Rate Framework

A source of extreme frustration for ABP is the refusal of government to implement the proposed Grazing Lease Rental Rates Framework that was developed and supported by all grazing organizations in the province, including ABP, the Western Stock Growers Association (WSGA), the Alberta Grazing Leaseholders Association (AGLA), the Northern Alberta Grazing Association (NAGA), the Central Alberta Grazing Association (CAGA), and the Rocky Mountain Forest Range Association (RMFRA). We are all deeply worried about a countervail challenge from the U.S., especially with a strong protectionist sentiment and the completion of the CUSMA, and we know that the current grazing lease rental rate framework leaves us extremely vulnerable in this area. We know that producers will not unanimously support the proposed framework, but there is widespread support for it in the industry and unanimous support for it among grazing organizations.

- **ABP recommends the government commit to long term (20 year) secure tenure of leases, grazing permits, and grazing reserves throughout Alberta and including the Castle Park and Bighorn Country areas.**

- **ABP recommends implementing “Tenure for Stewardship” to ensure greater security of tenure for those who maintain the health of public lands under grazing dispositions.**
 - **ABP strongly recommends the government consider establishing public lands under grazing dispositions as OECM’s that would contribute to Canada’s Target 1 goals for conservation and biodiversity. This would also ensure long term stewardship and secure tenure for grazing disposition holders.**
 - **ABP strongly recommends immediate implementation of the legislative and regulatory changes needed for the modernized Alberta Public Land Grazing Framework as developed by the grazing stakeholder associations.**
 - **ABP recommends that government take the time to properly consult and develop management plans with grazing stakeholders in the Bighorn Area before the Bighorn proposal is finalized or fully implemented.**
 - **ABP recommends the government explore increased grazing opportunities on public lands in Northern Alberta.**
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Access to Labour

Our industry continues to face challenges finding a sufficient labour force to meet business opportunities. We know that immigration is a federal issue, but the Government of Alberta could be a stronger advocate for bringing foreign workers to Canada and could use provincial programs (Alberta Immigrant Nominee Program) to help these workers become permanent citizens. Although the Temporary Foreign Workers Program is an important introductory tool for our industry, more needs to be done to either extend the workers’ terms or help TFW’s become permanent residents.

- **ABP recommends that provincial and federal governments reduce barriers to allow for increased permanent foreign workers. This could include improvements to the Temporary Foreign Workers program, streamlining and increasing the target numbers in the Alberta Immigrant Nominee Program, and adjusting labour classifications for immigrants.**
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Labour Legislation (Bill 6)

Farm and Ranch Safety

Although Alberta Beef Producers did not support Bill 6 and how it was implemented, there were components of Bill 6, such as farm and ranch safety, that could be supported given appropriate legislation and exemptions made within the Occupational Health and Safety (OHS) Code to tailor safety to the unique nature of farm and ranch businesses. The AgCoalition was formed with representation from 29 agricultural organizations to review and address all aspects of Bill 6 and make recommendations for improvements.

Alberta Beef Producers participated in an AgCoalition working group to translate the OHS Code into practical guidelines that would meet the legislative intent for safety, while providing safe practices that make sense on a farm or ranch. The Government accepted all recommendations from this group which included amendments and exemptions to the existing Code, as well as legislated new Code requirements specific to farm and ranches.

In addition, a new industry-led farm and ranch safety association, AgSafe Alberta, was formed to provide awareness, education, and training to make all farm and ranch workers safer.

Recommendations:

- **ABP strongly supports improved health and safety for all people working on farms and ranches, not just waged, non-family employees. We are a founding member of AgSafe Alberta, a producer-led farm and ranch safety association.**
- **ABP is supportive of the new OHS Guidelines developed for farm and ranch safety and think that these guidelines and the OHS Code amendments related to farms and ranches will be practical for farmers and ranchers to implement.**
- **Due to the lack of sufficient consultation on Bill 6 and the elements of the bill that go far beyond the consultation that did occur, ABP recommends that Bill 6 be repealed and replaced with more appropriate safety legislation. This legislation should be introduced only after full consultation with farmers and ranchers and should recognize the work that has been done by the AgCoalition on the new agricultural OHS Guidelines and OHS Code amendments.**
- **ABP supports on farm investigations of serious incidents and fatalities as an important measure to reduce these incidents from occurring in the future. OHS officers need to have a very good understanding of how a farm and ranch operates and how to interact respectfully and effectively with farm and ranch owners.**
- **ABP recommends the repeal of Bill 30 as it is too complex in the requirements for OHS and WCB for farm and ranch owners to implement.**

Employment Standards

Alberta Beef Producers has always supported the need for insurance to take care of workers and their families in the event of an injury or sickness. There are many insurance companies that can provide sufficient coverage to meet the specific needs of various farm and ranch work environments. As long as the insurance is as good or better than WCB coverage, ABP believes employers should have the option to choose the coverage that works best for their employees.

- **ABP supports a requirement for employers to have sufficient insurance for their workers, but should be given the option to choose the insurance provider that works the best for their business and employees**
- **ABP recommends further revisions and improvements to youth employment standards that are more practical to farm families.**

Right to collective action/Unions

Although we recognize the overall right of workers to form associations, there must be a model developed for worker associations on farms and ranches that eliminates the right to strike if animal welfare and care, or crop and feed harvesting would be at risk. The Alberta government has a provision to form an emergency committee that could force workers back to work if animals or crops are threatened. However, due to the time sensitivity of harvest or animal care, we are not confident that a “back to work” directive could be implemented in time (within days) to prevent a crop loss or animals being compromised.

In addition, we strongly support the repeal of Bill 17 which removes the requirement for a secret ballot of workers before union certification. We think this Bill could open the door to increased bullying or harassment of workers leading to severe adverse effects on worker morale and well-being.

- **ABP is not confident that current models of labour legislation provide sufficient protection for animal welfare and food security in the case of a labour disruption and as a result, we don't support allowing farms and ranch workers to form unions and take collective action.**
- **ABP recommends the repeal of Bill 17**

Carbon Levy

Alberta's beef industry is very much a “trade-exposed” industry that faces global competition from producers in countries that are not showing the same level of climate leadership as Alberta. The impact of Alberta policies on the competitiveness of our industry will be most noticeable in North American markets, where our producers and processors compete for cattle, beef, and market share with operations from the U.S. and other provinces that don't face the costs imposed by the Climate Leadership Plan. Although there is an exemption for farm fuel, which we appreciate, the carbon levy has increased direct and indirect costs to beef producers.

Beef producers work very hard to decrease environmental impacts and ensure land, water, and natural resources are used as efficiently and responsibly as possible. This also include measures that reduce pollutants and greenhouse gases. We believe any increased costs due to the carbon levy need to be offset by giving producers the opportunity to mitigate those costs through other projects or programs such as those recognizing the value of ecosystem services (carbon sequestration and healthy wildlife habitat, for example) that beef producers provide to society.

ABP recommends

- **The AB government support the creation and further development of payment for ecosystem services (PES) programs that will provide incentives for beneficial land and water management practices to preserve critical agricultural land, improve environmental health, and build resiliency into the agriculture sector.**
- **The AB government continue to invest in research to improve forage and feed quality, digestibility, animal and crop genetics, and animal health for increased production efficiency and reduced environmental impact per kg of beef produced.**

- **The Alberta government invest in on-farm and industry programs and initiatives on energy efficiency and economical renewable energy to reduce the impact of increased energy costs, especially energy for the feedlot and processing sectors.**

For our position on Alberta’s Climate Leadership plan and environmental stewardship, please refer to the document on our website: <https://www.albertabeef.org/producers/policy-regulation>

Regulatory Burden and Municipal Taxation

The concentration of federally inspected beef processing facilities has been largely driven by market forces, but our federally inspected plants do face ongoing regulatory and labour issues that challenge their economic viability. The loss of smaller provincial abattoirs can be traced to the difficulties in meeting federal inspection requirements and restrictions on sales of meat from provincially inspected plants. This affects the ability of these plants to derive the greatest possible value from each carcass by selling products to different markets. Removal of the barriers to interprovincial sales of meat from provincially inspected plants would be a substantial benefit for these operations.

Municipal Taxes and Municipal Development Plans

Another burdensome regulation is the Lethbridge County “head tax” which is having a significant economic impact on beef feedlot operators in that area. We believe this is an unfair tax and there are better ways to fund the infrastructure deficits in the county that would be much more fair to the residents and businesses in Lethbridge County. We also are seeing municipalities use Municipal Development Plans to create exclusion zones with severe restrictions on the development or expansion of Confined Feeding Operations (CFOs). We believe that the current system of assessing agricultural land and agricultural operations creates unfair taxation that encourages municipalities to take these steps that create competitive disadvantages within Alberta farm and ranch businesses.

- **ABP strongly supports reducing regulations that negatively impact the economic or environmental viability of beef farms and ranches. Interprovincial trade barriers are an example of regulations within Canada that need improvement.**
- **ABP strongly recommends the provincial government improve the system for assessing agricultural land and agricultural operations for municipal taxation.**
- **ABP recommends the provincial government strengthen the Agricultural Operation Practices Act (AOPA) to ensure that the Natural Resources Conservation Board (NRCB) has authority over the location and approvals for CFOs.**
- **ABP strongly recommends that the provincial government improve efficiencies in processing applications for permits, licenses, and projects, including water allocation approvals, grazing lease renewals and transfers of ownership, and foreign labour applications, where delays inhibit the ability of producers to run their businesses efficiently.**

Rural Infrastructure Investment

Agriculture has the potential to lead the diversification of the Alberta economy, and become recognized as the most sustainable agriculture industry in the world. However, to accomplish this we will require significantly more investment in rural infrastructure, including roads, bridges, water systems, technology, innovation, and integrated agricultural commodity systems. In addition, investment in information technology, including high speed rural internet and cell phone coverage, will be key to the long-term viability of many rural communities.

- **ABP recommends increased investment in rural infrastructure as well as rural high-speed internet to ensure innovation and sustainability continues in agriculture.**
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Research and Extension

Research and extension efforts are critical components of a vibrant, sustainable and profitable beef industry. Alberta Beef Producers supports research and extension efforts that improve the sustainability and competitiveness of the Albertan and Canadian beef industry. Research priority areas include **animal health and welfare (including antimicrobial use and resistance), feed grains and feed efficiency, forage and grassland productivity (including environment), beef quality, and food safety**. More detailed industry research and extension objectives can be found in the Canadian Beef Research and Technology Transfer Strategy. As government and industry resourcing is limited, it is essential that both government and industry ensure these funds are utilized in a manner that ultimately benefits the end user – beef producers. As such, it is important that priority research and extension objectives are aligned across jurisdictions and organizations. Further, it is not enough to simply complete research, publish a paper, and move on to the next topic. Researchers, government extension personnel and industry must work in a collaborative manner to ensure that new or improved innovations, technologies, or management practices are eventually adopted on farm, assuming practicality, profitability, or some other advantage exists for the producer.

- **ABP strongly recommends that the Alberta Agriculture and Forestry’s Science, Research and Innovation Framework be reworked to align more closely with industry research and extension priorities and contain a heightened focus on activities (i.e. productivity, extension) that will benefit the end-user (producers).**
- **Government needs a clear direction and focus for those employees whose main job description includes extension, and this should be shared with industry. This will improve effectiveness and alignment with industry extension efforts.**
- **ABP recognizes the difficulty posed by a government organization also funding their own employees through a grant application process. However, the current situation whereby Alberta Agriculture and Forestry researchers cannot receive grant funding from the province needs immediate rectification.**
- **Involving industry throughout all stages of the Strategic Research and Development application process, including the sharing of letters of intent and full proposals for review will help decrease duplication, increase opportunities for co-funding, and ensure alignment of industry and government priorities.**
- **ABP strongly recommends the renewal of the Alberta Beef, Forage and Grazing Centre Agreement, which expires March 31, 2020.**

Wildlife Management on Private and Public Lands

Beef producers who manage both private and public lands recognize the value of stewardship and conservation to ensure their land and water resources remain healthy for long term sustainability. While healthy rangelands are a benefit to cattle ranchers, they also provide abundant feed and a habitat for wildlife, which is an ecosystem service that benefits all Albertans. However, with increases in wildlife populations, both ungulates and predators, we have seen increasing wildlife depredations on private and public land. ABP supports the ability of producers to be compensated or recognized for the ecosystem services they provide (healthy wildlife populations and habitat), including compensation for financial losses caused by wildlife on crops and livestock.

Compounding the increased wildlife populations on lands managed by beef producers, we are also seeing increased forest and brush encroachment on grazing reserves in the Rocky Mountain Forest range and on grazing leases outside the forest ranges. This is not only reducing the ability for domestic livestock to graze, but also affects wildlife habitat and causes wildlife to move out of public lands onto private lands. More streamlined approvals for forest control on grazing leases, as well as in parks and forestry, will ensure grazing habitat is maintained for livestock and wildlife.

- **ABP recommends government support (both in staff time and financial) of improvements to the predator compensation program and the development of mitigation best management practices to reduce conflict between wildlife and landowners.**
- **When developing wildlife management strategies for species at risk or other wildlife, landowners must be included in the development of these strategies (for example, Grizzly Bear recovery plans, and reintroduction of Bison onto lands adjacent to landowners)**
- **Government must streamline the approval process for making range improvements on grazing dispositions, including removal of encroaching forests and brush.**

Animal Health & Welfare

Animal health and welfare is a shared priority of government and industry. All sectors and jurisdictions have a responsibility to ensure animal health and welfare is safeguarded. While governments have the ultimate regulatory authority, engagement with industry on animal health and welfare issues often results in enhanced protocols or processes, and better outcomes for the animals involved.

- **ABP strongly recommends the development and implementation of a long-term, fully-resourced, management strategy for diseased or infected wildlife, including TB infected bison residing in and around Wood Buffalo National Park and elk populations infected with liver flukes.**
- **ABP supports much needed improvements to diagnostic and surveillance capacity in the province.** These efforts need to be aligned with, and supportive of, national initiatives in these areas and not be focused on Alberta alone.

- **ABP recommends the reinstatement of Alberta funding to the Western College of Veterinary Medicine, while proceeding with the current planned enhancements of the University of Calgary’s Faculty of Veterinary Medicine’s student and infrastructure capacity.**
- **With expected amendments to traceability regulations, ABP recommends the reinstatement of the CCIA Mobile Field Representatives.** Although Alberta has the highest level of Premise Identification Number compliance in the country, it is not 100%, and there are many instances of incorrect information within the database. The Mobile Field Representatives help to ensure improved compliance and information accuracy.
- **While ABP supports the requirement for all medically important antimicrobials to be available by prescription only, we do not support restricting dispensing of these products to veterinary clinics (or in extremely rare cases, pharmacies) alone. We strongly recommend further investigation into other dispensing models which would alleviate our concerns regarding timely access.**
- **ABP recommends that the government continue working with industry and other relevant stakeholders regarding enhanced emergency preparedness.**

For questions regarding these positions or ABP policy inquiries not included in this briefing note, please reach out to:

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