



# BRITISH COLUMBIA CATTLEMEN'S ASSOCIATION

*Representing the Beef Cattle Industry of British Columbia*

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## **News Release** **Cattlemen Imprisoned by the Agricultural Land Reserve**

British Columbians want government to protect farmland as a way of providing food security for future generations. The BC Cattlemen's Association believes the most important factor in preserving farmland is to preserve the ranchers and farmers.

In 1972, the British Columbia government placed all agricultural lands into the Agricultural Land Reserve (ALR). As compensation for this taking of private land rights, the government put in place several industry support programs; the most important of which was Farm Income Insurance. Over the years and with changing governing parties, those programs were adapted or eliminated.

Today, the only income support program that is available, Agri-Stability, is not meeting the needs of ranchers. Margin based programs like this are not intended for long periods of income decline, as the ranching sector has experienced since 2003. The Province recently renewed its commitment to Agri-Stability for another 4 years without fixing the problems that prevent cattle producers from receiving payments. In the absence of properly functioning income support programs, ranchers need the option to diversify their business and supplement declining ranch income.

"I am not suggesting we abolish the ALR," explains Roland Baumann, Association President and rancher from Vanderhoof. "Rather society should help shoulder the responsibility." If society were able to cost-share the responsibility for caring for these lands, ranchers would then be better able to grow and develop their businesses, providing real food security for our province.

As the largest holder of agricultural reserve lands, ranchers are all too familiar with the restrictions the Agricultural Land Reserve places on their businesses. Lands within the ALR experience: artificially depressed property values, limits on the number of homes for

staff and retiring family members, restrictions for diversifying the business including the production of green energy from solar and wind generation. Government's lack of financial support to live up to the deal of the ALR, along with the onerous legislation such as the Carbon Tax, have forced former supporters of the ALR to rally against its continuation.

"We feel imprisoned," explains Judy Guichon, rancher from the Nicola Valley. "Everyday we fight to trim costs and keep this business alive. Selling some of our land is a last resort, but for many it is the only option left to save the rest of the ranch."

If government isn't able to work with industry to alleviate this financial crisis, then affected ranchers need to be able to remove their land from the reserve if they wish or need to do so. Under those circumstances the decision to stay or exit should lay solely with the landholder and not with the Province, nor the Agriculture Land Commission or Local Government.

BC ranchers have used up their savings, sold equity in their operations, taken jobs off the ranch and piled on more debt, always optimistic that better days were ahead. Unfortunately those better days have yet to arrive and too many producers have had no option but to exit the industry.

In less than five years, BC's ranching industry has shrunk by 35%, the largest decline in Canada. When agriculture is not profitable, and producers leave the industry the ripple is felt all throughout the community. Support industries such as cattle dealers, auction barns, trucking companies, feed lots, packing plants, machinery suppliers, feed dealers, mechanics, welders, veterinarians, accountants, lawyers, food-processors are all adversely affected by the loss of clientele. These businesses are the backbone of rural BC communities. Too often, the benefits that agriculture provides are undervalued and the struggles go ignored.

The concept of an agricultural land reserve is noble. However, it is failing the farmers and ranchers. We are calling upon British Columbians to stand up for agriculture. Lifting the restrictions imposed by the ALR will give landowners the tools to help ourselves.

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