



BRITISH COLUMBIA CATTLEMEN'S ASSOCIATION

Representing the Beef Cattle Industry of British Columbia

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NEWS RELEASE

Cattlemen Satisfied with the First Ranching Task Force Report

The BC Cattlemen's Association is satisfied with report publicly released today by the Minister of Agriculture & Lands, Honourable Steve Thomson, and the Parliamentary Secretary for the Ranching Task Force, MLA Terry Lake. This is the first report from the Task Force which represents several months of intense work by both industry and government to review and address the challenges facing the beef cattle industry.

The report identifies 45 regulatory changes that government can implement in order to removing regulatory barriers for BC's ranching family businesses. 97% of British Columbia ranches are small to medium size family run businesses with small operating margins. Removing these unnecessary hurdles can help strengthen these businesses and position the industry for the future. The 45 recommendations fall under the priorities set out by the Task Force which are to: secure access to water; secure access to sufficient rangeland and forage; implement low cost, regional animal waste disposal options; and make improvements to the Agricultural Land Reserve.

"The Premier's announcement last May declaring the Ranching Task Force created an expectation among ranchers that funding would be available to assist us through this difficult time," explains Roland Baumann, BC Cattlemen's Association President. "Our industry is in the worst financial crisis we have seen in recent history and this expectation cannot be met with deregulation alone."

The economic crisis ranchers have been experiencing for the past six years continues to worsen. Many ranchers have gone into debt and borrowed against their equity, and taken off farm jobs in order to carry their families through these hard times. Others, as a last resort, have had to sell out and leave the business that has been in their families for generations. British Columbia's beef cattle industry has shrunk by one third, the sharpest decline in all of Canada. Without government intervention, it is difficult to say how many more ranchers will decide to exit the industry.

BCCA General Manager, Kevin Boon explains, “These financial losses are not the result of bad business planning. Instead they are the result of things beyond a rancher’s control that have put the industry in this precarious position.”

World demand for beef is rising and at the same time beef production is shrinking. Agricultural economists suggest that by 2012, the beef industry will be in a favourable position because of supply and demand and will have a strong future ahead. British Columbia needs to ensure that we position ourselves to capitalize on these opportunities in both local and international markets. In the meantime, financial assistance is desperately needed to help stop the downward spiral the industry is experiencing. Government’s Business Risk Management Programs were never intended for such a tremendous downturn, and are not providing the financial backstop industry need so desperately.

“Without money, there will be no meaningful outcome. It is unreasonable to create a Task Force but not provide the money necessary to implement their recommendations,” says President Baumann of the Task Force. The BC Cattlemen's Association put forward a proposal to the Task Force for the province to issue financial incentives to beef cattle producers for achieving a set of high standards for environmental stewardship, food safety, and animal health. The Task Force has agreed to recommend to the Premier that this proposal be implemented when the Province is in a better financial position. This proposal is the equivalent of an economic stimulus and is intended for the short-term. The Association knows that market demand is the only factor that can return the industry to being profitable.

The BC Cattlemen's Association understands that Premier Campbell will be reviewing the recommendations outlined in the Task Force report and we will continue to work together to address the steep challenges facing our industry.

The Association would like to thank our rancher volunteers who worked tirelessly on the Task Force: Roland Baumann (Vanderhoof), Judy Guichon (Quilchena), and Ed Salle (Barriere). Each of whom took precious time away from their own ranching operations to help move their industry forward during a very challenging time.

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