



# **INTERIM PROGRESS REPORT**

## **NATIONAL BEEF SUSTAINABILITY STRATEGY**

Identifying focus areas and strategies for the CRSB and its membership to continually advance the sustainability of the Canadian beef industry



January 2020



# MISSION

Advance continuous improvement in Canadian beef industry sustainability through multi-stakeholder engagement, collaboration, communication and science.

# VISION

The Canadian beef industry is recognized globally to be economically viable, environmentally sound and socially responsible.

# FIVE PRINCIPLES OF SUSTAINABLE BEEF



NATURAL RESOURCES



PEOPLE & THE COMMUNITY



ANIMAL HEALTH & WELFARE



FOOD



EFFICIENCY & INNOVATION



# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In 2016, the Canadian Roundtable for Sustainable Beef (CRSB) published its first-ever National Beef Sustainability Assessment, benchmarking the overall performance of the Canadian beef industry from environmental, social and economic perspectives. A National Beef Sustainability Strategy accompanied the assessment and was the first step in developing a comprehensive approach to advancing initiatives that will further enhance the sustainability of the Canadian beef industry. This interim report shows substantial progress has been made in building a stronger and more united beef sustainability community and increasing awareness of sustainable beef production.

The CRSB will be communicating the progress made to date and areas that need attention over the coming three years in order to meet the goals set out in the strategy by 2023. The implementation of action items identified will advance the journey of sustainability within the Canadian beef industry.

## A STRONGER, MORE UNIFIED BEEF SUSTAINABILITY COMMUNITY

A stronger beef sustainability community has been supported through a larger and diverse CRSB membership, attendance at CRSB AGM and Semi-Annual meetings, and growing communication reach through the website, CRSB Insider (E-newsletter) and social media channels. Building CRSB as the trusted go-to forum for sustainable beef conversations has been advanced through the CRSB's business strategy and its focus on three core areas of work: Sustainability Benchmarking, the *Certified Sustainable Beef Framework* and Sustainability Projects.

In December 2017, the *Certified Sustainable Beef Framework* was launched; consumer facing logos and accompanying Claims to help support communications were released in 2018. As of August 2019, two foodservice companies (McDonald's and Harveys) are sourcing a portion of their beef from CRSB Certified farms and ranches. There are two beef processors certified to the Sustainable Beef Processing Standard, and three further processors certified to CRSB Chain of Custody Requirements to

track cattle and beef through the supply chain. As of December 31, 2019, over 1200 Canadian farms and ranches are Certified Sustainable, representing 12% of the Canadian cattle herd.

A Sustainability Projects Inventory was launched in May 2019, providing a database of completed and ongoing projects from both member and non-member industry participants that contribute to continuous improvement of beef production across Canada. Relationships have been built through an expanded CRSB membership and connections with the research community have been supported through the Scientific Advisory Committee.

The continued advancement of sustainability within the Canadian beef industry requires communication, collaboration, and engagement from all stakeholders. This engagement and collaboration throughout the beef value chain is crucial to advancing sustainability, and everyone plays a role.

## ENVIRONMENT

Industry has been actively addressing the items on climate change, land use, water and food waste. While many of the performance indicators for the environment are unavailable until the next update of the NBSA in 2023, crop and forage yields have been increasing.

Increased communication to enhance the general public's understanding of the Canadian beef production system is being accomplished not only by the CRSB, but also through collaboration with groups like the Canadian Cattlemen's Association's Public and Stakeholder Engagement program and Canada Beef. Canada Beef uses the National Beef Sustainability Assessment (NBSA) results in developing messaging for their Environmental Pillar of the Canada Beef brand. The Public and Stakeholder Engagement program's coordination of the "Guardians of the Grasslands" video is an excellent example of the sustainability community working together to communicate the concept of

beef sustainability with the public.

Communication of the NBSA results are used consistently by CRSB and its members and stakeholders. The Sustainability Benchmarking page at [crsb.ca](http://crsb.ca) is one of the most-visited pages on the site, and includes reports, factsheets, infographics and videos about the Assessment results and Strategy. A video with accompanying discussion questions were developed for post-secondary introductory animal science classes and were distributed to all agricultural programs across Canada in 2019.



### CLIMATE CHANGE

Feed efficiency has increased considerably in the past 50 years. Improvements in feed efficiency is attributable to breeding practices, improved animal health, growth promoting technologies, nutritional management, carbon storage and biodiversity.



### LAND USE

The 2016 Census of Agriculture reported 5 million fewer acres of pasture and hay compared to 2011. Competition from other land uses and technological advancements that allow marginal lands to be cropped profitably will continue to pressure land use change.

The CRSB has provided letters of support for two projects (Alberta and Ontario) focused on understanding and advancing biodiversity.



### WATER

The Canadian industry has a relatively low blue water footprint. This is primarily due to the limited amount of irrigation for feed, as well as the presence of highly efficient production systems.



### FOOD WASTE

The CRSB has engaged with the National Zero Waste Council and National Zero Waste Strategy in the Canadian whole-chain food loss and waste study led by Second Harvest. In January 2019, Second Harvest published "The Avoidable Crisis of Food Waste" providing the first Canadian specific data on the topic.

## GUARDIANS OF THE GRASSLANDS

SOMETIMES WHAT YOU THOUGHT WAS THE PROBLEM, IS REALLY THE SOLUTION.

### GUARDIANS OF THE GRASSLANDS:

*SOMETIMES WHAT YOU THOUGHT WAS THE PROBLEM, IS REALLY THE SOLUTION.*

Guardians Of The Grasslands is a short documentary brought to you by a group of dedicated conservationists, ranchers and Canadian filmmakers. The film explores the current state of one of the world's most endangered ecosystems, the Great Plains grasslands, and the role that cattle play in its survival.

## SOCIAL

Industry has been actively addressing the items on working conditions, animal care and antimicrobial use. There has been a lot of activity on improving communication and resources available for farm safety. Painful procedures are a necessary part of the beef business; however, producers today have new tools to manage pain and they are using them. By 2017, nearly half of producers across Canada had adopted new pain mitigation methods. This represents a significant adoption rate within four years of the Code of Practice for the Care and Handling of Beef Cattle being published in 2013. Participation in Verified Beef Production Plus (VBP+) and the Feedlot Animal Care Assessment Program are growing.



### WORKER CONDITIONS

While farm safety was not identified as a high-risk area, it was identified as a key focus area for continuous improvement. The Canadian Agricultural Safety Association (CASA) and provincial agricultural safety groups provide in-person and online training and resources, and are working on improving communication and farm safety resources.

Mental health has been identified through numerous social media awareness campaigns within the agricultural community. The House of Commons Standing Committee on Agriculture and Agri-Food published the “[Mental Health: A Priority for our Farmers](#)” report in May 2019 with ten recommendations.



### ANIMAL CARE

Animal care is a priority for all stakeholders involved in the livestock industry. The Social Life Cycle Assessment (S-LCA) showed low risk for animal care indicators which is reflective of the Canadian beef industry’s significant investment to date in this area. Painful procedures are a necessary part of the beef business; however, producers today have new tools to manage pain and they are using them. The CRSB has a mutual membership with the National Farm Animal Care Council, which is responsible for developing the National Codes of Practice for care and handling of farm animals.



### ANTIMICROBIALS

Although the majority of antimicrobials that are used in Canadian beef production are of low importance in human health (category IV, which are not used in human medicine), the industry recognizes the importance of antimicrobial stewardship both for continued effective use and consumer concerns. Several programs and practices have been implemented to address this important societal issue, such as the VBP+ program, which focuses on appropriate and responsible use of antimicrobials as well as maintaining a veterinarian and client-patient relationship.

Industry has been actively addressing the items on antimicrobials with regulatory changes, investments in research and surveillance, and communication to producers and consumers. The Global Roundtable for Sustainable Beef’s [Statement on Antimicrobial Stewardship](#), developed through member and stakeholder feedback (including CRSB members), provides a foundation for communications. The Canadian Cattlemen’s Association approved a Statement on Antimicrobial Stewardship in March 2019.

The CRSB provided a letter of support for the research project “Genomic Antimicrobial Stewardship Systems from Evidence-based Treatment Strategies”.



Across Canada, nearly half of producer have adopted new pain mitigation methods when caring for animals.

## ECONOMIC

Industry has been actively addressing economic viability and consumer demand. For Canadian beef production to be economically sustainable in the long run, there must be both sustained consumer demand for the product and positive margins for producers to encourage continued production.



### PRODUCER VIABILITY

While long-term cost of production has increased, profitability has also increased with strong cattle prices for primary producers. The proportion of all farm type operators reporting paid non-farm work decreased between 2011 and 2016.

CRSB contributes to producer viability primarily through the development of a market driven *Certified Sustainable Beef Framework* that allows all supply chain members to participate and respond to the market signals on an individual basis that makes sense for their operation. McDonald's Canada and Harvey's Restaurants are sourcing a portion of their beef from CRSB Certified Sustainable Operations. A Communications, Claims and Labelling Guide provides members ways to communicate about membership, with Claims and consumer-facing logos available related to producer and processor certification and sourcing of beef from CRSB Certified Operations.



### CONSUMER RESILIENCE

Domestic and international demand for Canadian beef have increased from the 2013 baseline and remain historically strong.

The CRSB has been supporting member communications with consumers and the public. Many communication resources are available for use by retail and foodservice to answer consumer questions about beef. The CRSB Framework committee has developed a process for providing letters of support around the critical examination of newly developed technologies within a beef sustainability framework.



### There is clear market demand for sustainably-raised beef.

Two foodservice companies - McDonald's and Harveys - are sourcing a portion of their beef through the *Certified Sustainable Beef Framework*, and three packers have been audited to track cattle and beef from Certified Sustainable farms and ranches through the supply chain.



**1st** Outcome-based  
Certified Sustainable  
Beef Framework in  
the World



Since 2018  
**4.9 million pounds**  
of beef sold with a  
CRSB claim



**2 Certified**  
Processors



**+1000 Certified**  
Producers



**2 Foodservice**  
companies utilizing  
the Certification  
Framework



**3 Certified**  
Chain of Custody  
Operations

HARVEY'S 


## FILLING THE GAPS

If 100% of the activities were completed at the halfway mark it would indicate that the goals set were not ambitious enough. This halfway Interim Report provides an opportunity to re-focus efforts to ensure all goals and activities identified in the strategy are fully completed by 2023.

Of the 42 action items identified in the Sustainability Strategy, 76% (32) have been partially or completely addressed through industry and stakeholder activities. Some of the action items that need to be focused on over the next three years include:

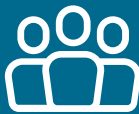


### ENVIRONMENTAL

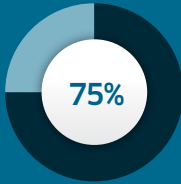


**86% (18 of 21) have been partially or completely addressed.**

- ◆ Develop a key performance indicator for riparian health
- ◆ Reduce food waste at consumer level
  - Support consumer education and awareness by joining trans-sectorial initiatives that target consumers, retailers, restaurants
  - Develop consumer education material on food preparation, freezing, preservation, etc.
- ◆ Promote improved product packaging
  - Promote research and adoption of packaging that enhances product life and reduces food waste
  - Enable dialogue regarding how package messaging can enable less food waste (e.g. replace 'best before' with 'use by' or 'freeze by' dates)




### SOCIAL

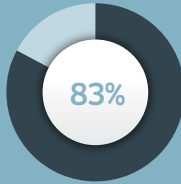


**75% (9 of 12) have been partially or completely addressed.**

- ◆ Improve median income for downstream value chain participants
- ◆ Promote a culture of diversity, inclusion and transparency within the beef supply chain
- ◆ Promote awareness of the Codes of Practice for the Care and Handling of Beef Cattle
- ◆ Regulatory changes to branding requirements on exported animals



### ECONOMIC



**83% (5 of 6) have been partially or completely addressed.**

- ◆ Communicate the role of technology and innovation in relation to the environmental, social and economic benefits to the beef industry
- ◆ Address consumer concerns about beef production and its impact on the environment

The CRSB encourages all members and industry partners to identify and prioritize any initiatives that advance these action items before the National Beef Sustainability Strategy is renewed in 2023. By reporting activities in the annual survey for sustainability projects, they will be included in future reports.



**CANADIAN ROUNDTABLE FOR SUSTAINABLE BEEF**

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