

# AGRICULTURAL AND RURAL DEVELOPMENT

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## **Enhance domestic markets and recapture closed international markets for agricultural products**

Agriculture is the number two industry in the Province of Alberta, yet all sectors of the industry seem to be facing many obstacles that represent serious impediments to its ability to capture any significant level of international market share:

The transmissible spongiform encephalopathy (TSE) diseases affecting agricultural livestock of the last several years have had a serious negative impact on the agricultural industry. The TSE diseases include bovine spongiform encephalopathy (BSE) in beef cattle, chronic wasting disease (CWD) in cervids (elk and deer) and scrapie in sheep.

Country or Origin Labeling (COOL), ostensibly implemented to ensure food safety, is actually a market protectionist piece of American legislation. The agricultural sector in Canada has relied heavily on the export market for its domestically raised products. International border policies and trade agreements tend to be politically motivated as opposed to being based on sound science. In addition, Canada and Alberta have not done an adequate job of maintaining established international market relationships nor of pursuing and developing emerging ones.

What is not widely known is that the closure of markets has affected not only the beef industry but also cervid, sheep and many other livestock industries, such as bison, goat and alpaca. The situation in Alberta and Canada for producers of livestock is extremely serious because of the loss of many key international markets.

Canada imports more foreign livestock products than it exports. Domestic markets for Canadian-raised products are underdeveloped because of a variety of issues including the following: inefficient transportation networks; foreign subsidies; inadequate processing capacities; limited resources for market development initiatives, especially for smaller industries; and cumbersome legislation affecting market access and expansion. These are only a few of the problems.

Canadian consumers have demonstrated a willingness to support domestically produced commodities, particularly when made aware of the difficulties facing agriculture. Canada has an excellent track record of respecting international trade agreements. This cannot be said of a number of its trading partners. Governments must ensure that trade playing fields are level by appropriate protocols and mutual respect and adherence to agreements. A balance between international market dependence and domestic markets is necessary for greater long-term stability for livestock producers.

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**The Alberta Chambers of Commerce recommends that the Government of Alberta and the Government of Canada:**

1. Immediately provide adequate resources to develop new products, support marketing initiatives, enhance transportation infrastructure and processing capacities;
2. Work with industry organizations to remove the encumbrances of restrictive legislation that inhibit trade and growth of international and domestic markets;
3. Lobby and negotiate with countries identified as restrictive to Canadian agricultural products to remove border restrictions so as to open closed international markets;
4. Maximize domestic marketing of our domestic markets for agricultural products to achieve a more balanced and sustainable Canadian marketplace for livestock industries.