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# MESSAGE FROM THE PREMIER OF ALBERTA

On behalf of the Government of Alberta, it is my pleasure to send greetings to the Alberta Cattle Feeders' Association (ACFA) as you celebrate your 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary.

Alberta beef is an important part of our identity and economy, and feedlots are integral to the success of our beef industry. For five decades, the ACFA has advocated on behalf of its members and worked with government and industry partners to ensure Alberta can continue to help feed the world.

I deeply appreciate the hard work and dedication of ACFA's board, staff, and members. Thank you for your contributions to the sustainability of Alberta's beef industry.

Congratulations on this milestone, and best wishes for continued success.



*Danielle Smith*

**Honourable Danielle Smith, Premier of Alberta**





ALBERTA  
AGRICULTURE AND IRRIGATION

Office of the Minister  
MLA, Drumbeller-Stettler

### MESSAGE FROM THE MINISTER

As Minister of Agriculture and Irrigation, it is my pleasure to extend congratulations to the Alberta Cattle Feeders' Association (ACFA) on 50 years of advocating for the province's cattle feeders.

Alberta is a beef province. We are famously Canada's largest cattle-producing province, and beef is by far our biggest agri-food export. We owe our stellar worldwide reputation for high-quality, nutritious beef in part to organizations like ACFA and the people you represent – hard-working, dedicated folks with new ideas.

For half a century, the ACFA has been a tireless advocate for your sector, which makes up a crucial link in the beef industry's supply chain. It has always found new ways to ensure the sector has steadily grown and remained strong through ups and downs.

As the beef industry continues to grow, we will look to ACFA to continue to keep us informed about its needs, concerns and new ideas.

Congratulations on this tremendous milestone and wishing ACFA success for many years to come.

Nate Horner  
Minister of Agriculture and Irrigation

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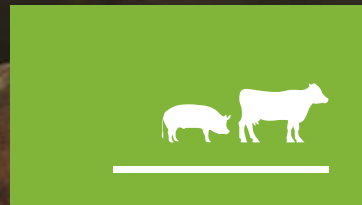
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# Fifty years!

**Through ups and downs and unexpected bumps of all kinds, the Alberta Cattle Feeders' Association (ACFA) has been the voice of our cattle feeding industry for a half century. I feel incredibly proud and privileged to be part of this industry, to lead our staff, and to work daily with the dedicated, hardworking, forward-thinking men and women who call themselves cattle feeders.**

Cattle feeding isn't an easy business. In just the last couple years alone, feeders have faced COVID uncertainty, drought, critical feed shortages, border stoppage, a rail strike, price crashes, and more. Any one of those challenges might have rocked a less solid organization, but we've stood strong because our members embody two words: passion and resilience.

We are united by the common vision of building a thriving beef industry recognized for the value it brings to Alberta and Albertans. From humble origins in the early 1970's when the cattle feeding industry first realized it needed its voice to be heard, to the dynamic industry leadership we provide today, we've come a long way.

Our three core priorities remain:

Advocacy: influencing public policy and the regulatory regime to enhance the competitiveness of the cattle feeding sector in Alberta;

Member value: building voluntary ACFA membership by delivering value to producers and industry alike; and

Partnership and collaboration: working with stakeholders to strengthen the Alberta and Canadian beef industry.

As the following summary of our 50-year history shows, together we have helped this industry through all kinds of challenges and successes.

To our members past and present, thank you! We

see and value your ongoing vision and commitment to building a strong, profitable, sustainable cattle feeding industry.

To the incredible men and women who have stepped up as our Board of Directors over five decades, please know what a huge impact you have made. We value your contribution, and thank you for the legacy you have helped build for future generations of cattle feeders.

To my current staff and all the staff who have worked tirelessly to build ACFA over the past fifty years, wow. Being part of such a cohesive and dedicated team continues to be a privilege.

And to future members, I invite you to join us! We are so much stronger when we stand together.



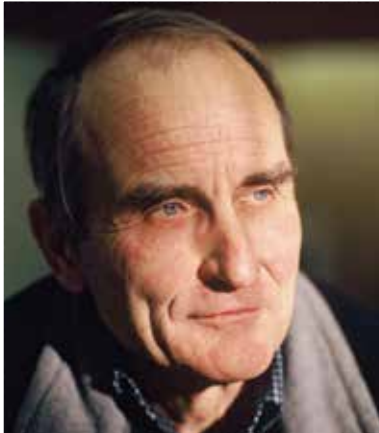
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**Janice Tranberg,**  
*President and CEO.*



## 1970's: Birth of a New Feeding Industry

As the cattle industry evolved, it was dominated first by stock growers. They were the aristocrats – the old name cattlemen who had been here since before there were fences. In the late '60's and early '70's, when feeding was just getting going, cattle feeders were a whole new group of people. We weren't men who came out of the cattle aristocracy. We were young guys who were willing to take a risk on feeding cattle." ACFA Founding Member, Garnet Altwasser.



Garnet Altwasser - Founding Member

The beef industry in Alberta changed enormously in the late 1960's as producers increasingly realized the benefits of specialized and local feeding. The very first larger-scale feedlots began in the late 1960's in this province, but within just a handful of years, a strong cattle feeding industry was emerging.

"By the early 1970's, fewer calves were being shipped east for slaughter, and cattle feeding was coming on pretty strong," says Altwasser.

But all was not easy in the new feeding industry. The Crow Rate subsidized farmers to ship grain east, forcing up the cost of feed grain in Alberta. Canada's banning of the growth hormone diethylstilbestrol hurt the Canadian beef industry's ability to compete with US producers. And in 1972, Canada passed a new beef grading system that favoured lean carcasses and

penalized cattle with marbling.

"Our science and grading agencies went down the road of rewarding carcasses that had the leanest meat, but they forgot about eating quality. Canadian cattle going south for slaughter were not rewarded in the American system. Our industry was going in one direction, but our major buyer was going in another direction," says Altwasser.

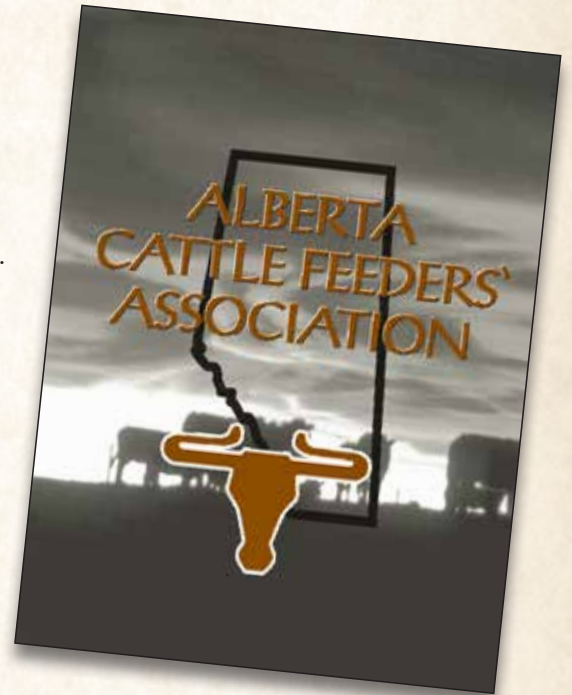
Not feeling well-represented, cattle feeders banded together and formed the Alberta Cattle Feeders Association (ACFA) in February 1973.

**"When you are in the early stages of a growing industry, all you know is that it makes economic sense. There was enough common interest peculiar to the cattle feeding industry, and there were enough common issues that would make a difference to your bottom line if you could get those rules changed. At that time, I don't think any of us had any idea how significant cattle feeding in this province would become,"** says Altwasser.

### The Early Years: Down But Never Out

That ACFA survived the 1970's is due to its founding members flatly refusing to let the faltering organization die.

"Quite frankly, those first years, it didn't go very well," says Altwasser. "Our biggest problem was that we were always short of money."



While most cattle feeders bought into what the new association was trying to do, few were willing to support it financially. In order to keep the organization afloat for the first decade of its existence, founding members regularly wrote personal cheques to cover ACFA's operational expenses.



Ben Thorlakson  
Chair 1980 -1981





*John Carnine  
Chair 1977-1979*

**“We had a group of people who really believed in the industry and the organization. We knew it had a purpose for our businesses. None of us were there with a missionary zeal. We all had a vested interest and a belief that this organization was the way to get some of the big issues looked at. We had faith that these were issues worth fighting for,” says Altwasser.**

“When I started, we were in debt. When they asked me to

become president, I remember talking with three or four other directors and saying I would become president if all of us were willing to jointly be good for the liability of the ACFA’s debt if we couldn’t turn it around. After I started, one of our biggest initiatives was to try to give the cattle feeders some profile and make the organization self-sustaining.” Ben Thorlakson, Chair, 1980-1981

In the early 1980’s, Albertan producers were captive to a few major packers in western Canada, and most of the cattle were being shipped east to Montreal and Toronto. John Carnine, ACFA’s chair from 1977– 1979, had the vision to open up the Pacific Northwest to Canadian fed cattle.

“In 1983, we started teaching people how to market fed cattle into the States, which had never been done before. That brought about a little more than a decade of prosperity for the industry.” Don Saynor, General Manager, 1981 to 1991.

The legacy of the 1970’s-era ACFA was industry commitment,



*Mayor Ralph Klein  
1986 ACFA Convention*

passion... and a whole lot of financial uncertainty. To try to tackle ACFA’s debt and gain financial stability, its leadership in 1980 decided to host an independent annual meeting and industry tradeshow and to publish a magazine.

Revenue from advertising space in the magazine and booth space at the tradeshow surprised everyone, and quickly turned ACFA’s financial position around. “Within just a



*1979 Board of Directors: Back Row: Glen Armitage, Russ Smith, Lyle Roach, Blake Holtman, Len Vogelaar, Hans Visser Front Row: Garnet Altwasser, John King, John Carnine, Ben Thorlakson, Pete Adams, Dennis Wobeser*





1986 ACFA Convention

couple years, we had the AGM that was worth going to and considered the 'it' cattle industry event of the year," Saynor adds.

**"I give Ben Thorlakson credit for pulling ACFA back from the edge. We were close to shutting it down. He said, 'let me try it for a year,' and he put on the tradeshow**

**and meeting. After that, ACFA gained enough momentum to keep going, and even though it didn't have access to check-off money, it was able to be self-supporting," says Altwasser.**

It wasn't just ACFA that matured and found its place in the 1980's – the feeding industry itself

did as well.

"The 1980's were a real stage of growth for the cattle feeding industry. A lot of people were getting into the business, and there was a lot of positive energy at the time. People were really starting to see that this industry was viable and worthwhile," says Thorlakson.



1987 Board of Directors: Front Row: Dennis Wobeser, Glen Armitage, Terry Peterson, Jack Olson, Marland Larter, Len Vogelaar, Fred Mueller Back Row: Don Saynor, Bill Lawton, Ed Thiessen, Cor Van Raay, Wayne Forbes, Lance Camine, Keith Stickney



## 1990's: Boom Times

The feeding industry more than doubled its capacity during the 1990's. Growth was fueled by positive economics as well as several key factors.

In 1995, the federal government ended its Crow's Nest Freight Rate subsidy. The additional \$38/tonne cost to ship grain east meant the flow of grain to the east almost entirely stopped, creating a mountain of relatively cheaply priced feed grain. At about the same time, the federal and provincial governments and the cattle feeding industry agreed to a minimum payment price insurance program for cattle feeders.

**"Cattle feeding is like very few other industries in the world. You don't know what your input costs are and you don't know what price you will get at the end. There is a great deal of future gazing and guessing that goes into it. But, with the cheaper feed grains and**

**the insurance program that mitigated the fear of risk, it was unlikely in that period in the early 90's that this industry would lose money," says Ron Axelson, ACFA's General Manager from 1991-2006.**

By the late 1990's, however, it became increasingly clear that times were changing.

"Americans were taking notice that we were shipping large numbers of animals south. The Free Trade Agreement opened the door to a new market for Canadian beef, and we didn't want to do anything that would risk that," says Axelson.

Seeing the pork industry going through trade action after trade action, ACFA realized the Minimum Price Program made the Canadian



Ron Axelson  
GM 1991 - 2006

industry too vulnerable. So, ACFA asked the government to end the program.

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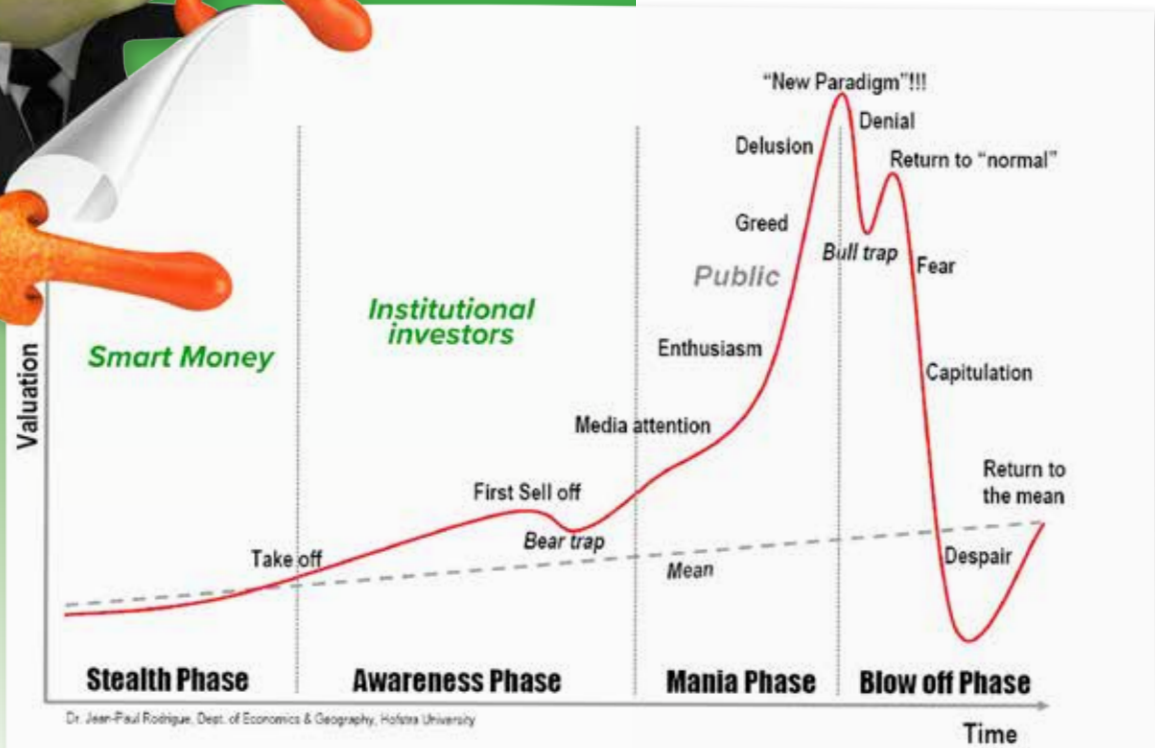


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Book published by ACFA outlining the history of cattle feeding in Alberta in 1998

Meanwhile, feed grain prices had slowly reversed.

“Over a period of a decade, we went from having the lowest priced grain in North America to the highest priced. Barley producers realized they could get a better return on other crops, so supply decreased and prices shot up: it was almost an exponential process. By the end of the 90’s, we were importing corn from the US,” says Axelson.

And, the era of nearly non-existent taxation was coming to an end.

“Municipalities were realizing that the 25,000 head feedlot, where trucks are going up and down the road nearly every day, were paying maybe \$1,500 while the guy three miles away in a little house in a little subdivision was paying \$3,000. That’s when the issue of taxation started to percolate,” says Axelson.

### Late 1990’s: Cattle Feeding Hits the Public Eye

With the feeding industry growing by 10 percent each year through the 1990’s, feedlot neighbours and townfolk started noticing... and complaining. Suddenly, environmental responsibility, animal welfare and good corporate citizenship sprang into priority status.

“What it really did was heighten in the minds of producers that now they were being heavily scrutinized. We needed to not only be talking about doing the right things, we needed to be seen doing the right things,” says Axelson.

In addition to communicating to producers the critical importance of their management and corporate citizenship choices, ACFA undertook several initiatives to place cattle feeders in a better light. In the mid-1990’s, ACFA developed a model to determine the economic impact of a cattle feeding operation to the local economy. Distributed to individual feeders, the project was intended as a tool feeders could use

when applying for permits, etc., to demonstrate their positive impact.

In 1997, ACFA brought together representatives from all of the livestock associations to form the Intensive Livestock Working Group (ILWG). Together, this strategic alliance went to the provincial government in 2001 to request province-wide legislation for confined feeding operations.


“We told the government that if the industry is going to be good corporate citizens, we need to know what the ground rules are, and they have to be the same for every operation across the province,” says Axelson.

In 2002, the provincial government agreed to the ILWG’s request by releasing the Agricultural Operations Practices Act (AOPA).

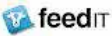


“It created continuity and predictability - a set of regulations that allowed you to say to your detractors that we are complying with standards and regulations. It didn’t stop all of the resistance, but what it did do was take a lot of the emotion out of the process,” says Axelson.

### Other notable highlights in the 1990’s

- 1991 Alberta Environmental Protection and Enhancement Act passed.
- 1992 ACFA works with the government to draft an “Intensive Livestock Operations Waste Management Code of Practice”.
- 1992 Canada alters the grading system to include increased marbling and align the Canadian to US system.
- 1993 Alberta Farm Animal Care formed by livestock producer organizations, including ACFA.
- 1995 Alberta government re-vamps Feeder Association program, substantially reducing loan guarantees.



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# 2000's: The Toughest Years of All

In 2004, ACFA grew its annual general meeting into the first ever Alberta Beef Industry Conference, a coming together of all sectors of the cattle industry. It was a big move for a traditionally highly siloed industry.

Meanwhile, people in the know started worrying about Canadian beef's ability to compete. The fact that feed grains were cheap and new markets were opening up disguised the fact that Canada was losing competitive ground compared to US production. However, this concern was nothing compared to what was about to come.

No one was more affected by BSE than cattle feeders. As margin players, cattle feeders were squeezed by the rock bottom prices. Unlike cow-calf producers who had the option to retain stock in hopes of better times, cattle feeders had no mechanism to offset losses.

Though the US border opened



2007 Board of Directors: Back Row: Bryan Walton, Doug Price, Lloyd Sproule, Stephen Morgan Jones, John Vander Heyden, Rick Paskal, Jeff Warrack Front Row: Larry Nolan, Rick Sears, Kee Jim, Jeff Ball, Herb Groenenboom

to boneless beef from cattle under 30 months of age (UTM) on August

8, 2003, cattle feeders had no mechanism to move live cattle across

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the border. This gave packers a golden opportunity to ship boxed meat. The glut of cattle waiting for processing meant feeders started competing for packing plant hooks, pushing prices through the floor.

“Once the border opened to beef, packers could literally wholesale our beef down south. They could make bags of money because the price of our cattle was so cheap. The margin, a lot of us were guessing, was hundreds of dollars per animal,” says Axelson.

Everyone tried to come up with ideas for how to move as much beef as possible at prices that would keep feeders intact. Unfortunately, ACFA didn’t have the resources to carry out an effective strategy.

So, ACFA put a vote to members proposing increasing the fee from 10 to 50 cents per head. The vote was unanimously carried. That an organization going through a crisis can ask for a 500 per cent increase in fees, then have the request overwhelmingly passed, shows how the feeder industry united during a critical situation.

With tens of thousands of animals backlogging monthly, ACFA worked with the federal and provincial governments to develop compensated set-aside programs that encourage producers to hold back more animals. ACFA also collaborated with other sectors of the beef industry, especially primary producer associations, to slow the stream of slaughter-ready animals.

Within the feeding industry itself, ACFA realized working together was the only way to survive the crisis.

“Believe it or not, we had a voluntary program going where we regularly conference-called cattle feeders and together decided on the lowest price we could possibly accept from packers. Once the number was established, we had a fax that we sent out to everyone, saying if no one under bids, we can hold the line at this and maybe we can survive,” says Axelson.

“Those years around BSE, people opened their minds. They didn’t just toss down an idea because it was new. It really changed our industry’s strategic thinking mentality. It was exciting because we got to test some new programs, and many were successful. The reward was you saw a great percentage of the industry survive through that two-year period,” says Axelson.



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*Bryan Walton  
CEO 2007-2019*

### **Late 2000's: Climbing Out of the Hole Post-BSE**

Hopes for a quick return to normal post-BSE were not to be. Negotiating re-access with previous trade partners would take many years; regaining negligible risk status from the World Health Organization would take nearly two decades. With many markets closed or limited, the mid-2000's were challenging years for cattle feeders.

Frustration propelled feeders from across the country to band together. In 2007, ACFA was instrumental in helping build the National Cattle Feeders' Association (NCFCA), finally giving all Canadian cattle feeders a voice in Ottawa.

"When BSE hit, the value of the inventory in feedlots went to zero. It was a grave situation," says Bryan Walton, ACFA CEO from 2007 - 2019. "Neither ACFA back in the 1970's nor NCFCA after BSE were intended to create competition with the rest of the industry. They were created to provide a vehicle to allow more direct access to policy makers."

Advocating for market access, both via ACFA and NCFCA, remained a key priority through the late 2000's. As a member of the Canadian Agri-Food Trade Alliance (CAFTA), ACFA was involved in negotiations and renegotiations

for the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) in 2006, the Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement for Trans-Pacific Partnership (CPTPP) starting in 2012, and the Canada-European Union Comprehensive Economic and Trade Agreement (CETA) in 2016.

"We have to find a home for 35 percent of what we produce, so international trade is very important," says Walton.

While ACFA's big efforts stand out, some of the smaller, quieter steps produced as much long-term impact. Through the 2010's, ACFA focused on improving the organization's financial stability, stabilizing membership, retaining staff, building communications and developing a more contemporary image.

Guided by Walton, the organization also prioritized honouring its past: building a Legacy Dinner, adding board photos to the walls and finding ways to honour long-term members.

### **Other notable highlights in the 2000's**

- 2001 ACFA joins the Pacific Northwest Economic Region (PNWER) to build

continuity between trading states and provinces.

- 2004 Alberta Beef Industry Council (ABIC) presents its "Consolidated Beef Industry Plan: Actions for the Industry if Borders Remain Closed" at the first ever Alberta Beef Industry Conference in Red Deer.
- 2007 ACFA works with Alberta Financial Services Corporation to create the Alberta Farm Recovery Plan, \$165 million in financial assistance designed to offset the rising costs facing the livestock sector.
- 2007 ACFA actively involved in creating the new Alberta Livestock and Meat Strategy (ALMS).
- 2008 ACFA creates the Alberta Beef Industry Alliance that moves forward on promoting new industry models after gaining historic refundable check-off.
- 2009 Western Stock Growers Association (WSGA) and the ACFA advocate for a review of the non-refundable check-off (Bill 43).



*ACFA Directors Rick Paskal, Glen Thompson and Larry Nolan meet with Hon. Shirley McClellan in 2003*





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## 2010's: Success Through Relationships

One of the biggest priorities for the ACFA is to foster a positive public image. That priority really grew during the 2010's, as average Albertans moved further from farm life, social media took hold and public opinion became increasingly shaped by the loudest voices.

Through the 2010's, cattle feeding's 'social license to operate' emerged on three main fronts: animal care, animal health, and the environment.

"Increasingly, we had to maintain our transparency and, in the eyes of consumers, our credibility. We had to be able to talk about how we produce food," says Walton.

In 2013, ACFA initiated "Beef the Festival", an annual, two-day, interactive consumer outreach and education event that covered everything beef from health protocols, to feeding, care and transportation, to cuts of beef and taste sampling. ACFA tried to target the festival to every demographic, with events ranging from an accessible-to-all Family Day to a \$250/

plate Iron Chef white tablecloth dinner. ACFA also arranged for member producers to visit grocery stores to talk one-on-one to consumers.

**"We wanted to tell our story, at least in part, through the culinary route: fork to farm instead of the other way around," says Walton. "Food is something people connect through."**

ACFA didn't just talk. "Based on member feedback, we built a model targeting animal care, health and production, environmental stewardship, and investment in agricultural people and our communities," says Page Stuart, Board Chair in 2014-2015.

ACFA also sought out opportunities to partner with others in the



Page Stuart  
Chair 2014-2015

value chain, including remaining a key partner in Alberta Farm Animal Care

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(AFAC), to build best practices and a more united voice. In 2017, ACFA took that partnership priority a step further, helping build the Canadian Roundtable for Sustainable Beef.

“The people around that table, from all parts of industry, had the foresight to understand that we needed to be together. Building relationships with the Nature Conservancy of Canada and the World Wildlife Fund and having them help us advocate and tell our story proved very powerful,” says Walton.

Relationships with others in the agriculture industry were also key to tackling other priorities. In 2016, Alberta feeders and other farmers successfully fought Bill-6, the provincial government’s out-of-touch ‘farm safety’ proposal.

The late 2010s represented important years for building connections with the government. While most in the cattle feeding industry stay in for the long term, governments and the decision-making politicians who lead them come and go.

“Anytime there was a new government, a lot of our work was engaging MLA’s who didn’t have much of a background in agriculture and helping them understand our cattle feeder priorities,” says Ryan Kasko, ACFA’s Board Chair in 2018 - 2019. “I think it really shows why organizations like ACFA are important, because politicians can’t know everything.”

Walton’s previous employment in the Minister of Agriculture’s office in Ottawa proved a boon to ACFA, because he understood how to get face time with critical government bodies.



Ryan Kasko  
Chair 2018-2019

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John Vander Heyden Sr. first recipient of the ACFA Honorary Life Member award pictured here with grandson Curtis 2010

**“You have to know how to work with the government. Do you want to fight or do you want to win? If you fight, that’ll be the last time you go through that door. If you want to win, sometimes you have**

**to do things a little differently,” says Walton.**

That ‘doing things differently’ meant ACFA invested in one-on-one meetings with government representatives, an MLA dinner, and feedlot tours.

“We were proud to showcase the best of the best cattle feeders in the world,” says Walton, “and by doing that, helped the government understand our business in a more meaningful way.”

Meanwhile, the worry of another disease outbreak, which this time could be Foot and Mouth Disease (FMD), loomed in ACFA’s collective minds.

“That is the Big Daddy. If we were ever hit with FMD, it would be devastating,” says Walton. To mitigate risk as much as possible, ACFA in the late 2010’s worked with diverse members of the value chain to pre-plan for crisis, including developing an industry risk management strategy, creating a feedlot emergency preparedness plan, and thinking through a vaccine policy. In 2014, ACFA also supported the launch of a Business Risk Management program at Lethbridge College.

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## 2010's: Getting Along with our Friends to the South

Trade transparency at the Canada-US border has strongly shaped the cattle feeding industry over the past two decades.

The US instituted mandatory Country of Origin Labeling (COOL) in 2003, costing Canadian beef producers in the range of \$600 million per year. In 2015, the World Trade Organization ruled that COOL was discriminatory.

"The fight against COOL was an example of a real team effort that allowed commerce to proceed as it should," says Walton.

Other negotiations also went in Canada's favour. In the mid-2010's, ACFA successfully lobbied for the free flow of feeder cattle across the Canada-US border, arguing that Canadian cattle shouldn't require a second 'CAN' brand, and that border impediments to easy movement up from the US should be removed.

Here at home and among Alberta's own cattlemen, major political discussion was also underway. A plebiscite determining whether the industry should move back to a mandatory non-refundable check-off, which would provide cattle industry organizations including ACFA consistent funding from \$2.5M in producer check-off dollars annually, occurred in the fall of 2018. Fifty-one percent of Alberta's cattle producers who voted, voted to keep the mandatory refundable service charge model.

While the result was not in support of a mandatory check-off, the relationships formed between the cattle organizations leading up to the plebiscite have proven extremely positive for the cattle industry to this day, allowing it to work more closely on government advocacy and messaging.

**"The connections we built, especially with the Alberta Beef Producers and Canadian Cattlemen's Association, have been a success," says Janice Tranberg, who took over as CEO just**



2012 Board of Directors - Back Row: Jeff Warrack, Mike Sears, Martin Zuidhof, Bryan Walton, John Lawton, Glen Thompson, Leighton Kolk, Greg Van Vaerenbergh, Russ Evans Front Row: Jason Hagel, Lyle Miller, Doug Price, Page Stuart, Brent Chaffee, Ryan Kasko

**around the time of the plebiscite. "NCFCA and CCA, have bi-weekly calls to talk about our key priorities. We have certainly enhanced the level of collaboration and we've seen the benefits."**

**Whether another debate about refundability occurs in the future remains to be seen.**

"I don't think the issue will ever be dead, honestly," says Kasko, who chaired the ACFA Board when the industry vote occurred. "As long as our organizations are struggling to get funding, I think it will always be an issue."

While no one likes to pay tax, Kasko says there is value to feeders committing their dollars – and their time – to ACFA.

**"I've always been happy to write a cheque for ACFA because I think the organization does a lot of important work. I think anyone in the feeding industry should make a commitment to spending some time serving on the board, attending meetings, and writing a cheque. It can only represent us if we invest in it."**

**Other notable highlights in the 2010's**

- 2012 ACFA spearheads the Agricultural Industry Labour Council of Alberta, a group of

associations that focus on improvements to the temporary foreign worker program.

- 2012 End of the Canadian Wheat Board.



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# 2020's: Pandemic!

COVID-19 impacted almost every aspect of the cattle feeding industry. Every link in the value chain was suddenly uncertain, with packing and processing the most uncertain of all.

“The challenges that were thrown at our industry were just crazy. We had supply chain issues and packing plant staffing issues and we backed up cattle forever. You name it, we faced it all. It was a huge challenge that I never want to go through again,” says Greg Schmidt, who was confirmed as ACFA’s Board Chair just days before the first pandemic closures. “But, I always say we get better from the challenges we face, and that’s definitely true here.”

ACFA jumped into action right from the beginning. One of their very first COVID projects was to build best management practices, vet them through Alberta Health, and then distribute them to feedlots.

“As we watched packing plants shutting down, we were scared that,

should a farm come down with COVID, how would the animals get cared for? It’s not like another business where you can shut the door,” says Tranberg.

Among COVID’s biggest practical challenges was navigating constantly changing health mandates. Like all in-person gatherings, the Alberta Beef Industry Conference had to be canceled outright in 2021. In 2022, ACFA managed a conference, but only thanks to the incredible efforts of ACFA staff.

COVID’s challenges also brought unexpected silver linings. Crisis forced the government to be more responsive and available than ever, and technology – specifically Zoom – allowed effective and efficient collaboration.

“I think a lot of good actually



Greg Schmidt  
Chair 2020 - 2021

came from the pandemic for our organization,” says Schmidt. “The experience made us better as a board and



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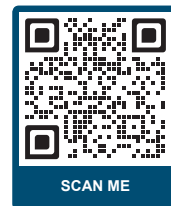
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we made important inroads with the government. We were able to do virtual meetings and bring in members to talk to their local MLA's about their issues. Because we were facing such a crisis, the government was willing to make time. We developed good relationships and respect on both sides."

As 2021 came to a close and the restrictions and uncertainty of COVID eased, cattle feeders – and the wider public at large – breathed a sigh of relief, hoping that life would return to normal. For cattle feeders, at least, it didn't. Right on the heels of COVID, late 2021 and early 2022 hammered

feeders with issue after unexpected issue.

**First came drought, which brought on an acute feed shortage.**

"I had people calling me in panic that they only had one to two weeks of feed left," says Tranberg.

ACFA raced to build relationships with grain companies and CP Rail. When the feed crisis seemed finally to be smoothing out, CP Rail workers went on strike. Though short-lived, the strike produced all-out panic among many feeders. Then came a border closure, which impeded both the movement of cattle south and the movement of feed north.

The good news through all of the upheaval and uncertainty, however, was that the relationships and cooperation built during COVID with government and other parts of the industry allowed faster and more effective response to these new crises.

**"The cattle industry has been fairly fractured. COVID pulled us**

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together as an industry, and I think that really strengthens all of us. When we need to be on the same page together, we can," says Schmidt.

By the time Jacob Bueckert took over as Board Chair in March 2022, most producers had lined up corn from the US and the feed crisis was under control. What wasn't fixed - and won't be until the cycle of production cycles back into feeders' favour - was the cost of production, with higher grain and fuel prices, together with employee shortages, making operation challenging for feeders.

"The loss across southern Alberta this last year on cattle ownership has been quite horrible. We're fighting basis and it's unfortunately not something the Association can help much with," says Bueckert.

Difficult as cattle feeding may be right now, Bueckert sees opportunity ahead.

"There's always opportunity. Supply and demand is a wonderful



MLA Feedlot Tour 2021

thing. Right now, there's good demand for meat, but we have an oversupply of what packers can process. Oversupply brings more capacity into the industry: they're adding packers in the US. We are going to lose some cows and then things will turn until it's the producers holding the cards," says Bueckert.

**Current Priorities**

Tranberg and Bueckert both say one of the biggest ongoing and future challenges is balancing consumers' demands and governments' requirements with the realities of cattle feeding.

"How do we help government find a balance between all the pressures that they are trying to push

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2020 Board of Directors - Back Row: John Schooten, Lyle Adams, Keith Gregory, Jacob Bueckert, James Bekkering, Bob de Boer, Janice Tranberg Front Row: Jeff Smith, Tom Thorlakson, Ryan Kasko, Kendra Donnally, Greg Schmidt, Karleen Clark

down onto feeders with recognition of the good work feeders have already done? Feeders are saying:

‘Hey, we’re not getting any credit for all the things we’re already doing’, yet government is making all these global commitments that demand that feeders constantly do more. Our job will be to bring more understanding or awareness of those issues,” says Tranberg. Bueckert says

the exclusion zones many communities are enacting, which are keeping feeders from expanding is a big problem.

“We’re working with government to try to rectify those in ways that work for the counties and for us,” says Bueckert.

ACFA is also working on helping government see the difference between proposed welfare

‘improvement’ and practical reality. For example, new electronic log books will make hauling cattle difficult if problems arise while in transport.

“If I’m hauling cattle and I get a flat tire that puts me over my service time, parking for X hours with cattle on the truck doesn’t make sense. We’re asking for reasonable flexibility. In the US, if you’re within 150 miles of your destination, you can override hours of service. This is another example of legislators bringing up something that seems like a good idea, but doesn’t always make sense in practice,” says Bueckert.

### **A Look to ACFA’s Future**

Tomorrow’s cattle feeding industry will have room for anyone with passion, drive and commitment. Kasko says a full 80 per cent of his feedlot staff don’t come to him with farming experience. That non-farming folk are showing interest bodes well for feeding’s future.

The feeding industry is also benefiting from more women joining. In 2014, Page Stuart became the first woman to chair ACFA’s Board.

“It was a humbling experience to be elected chair of an organization



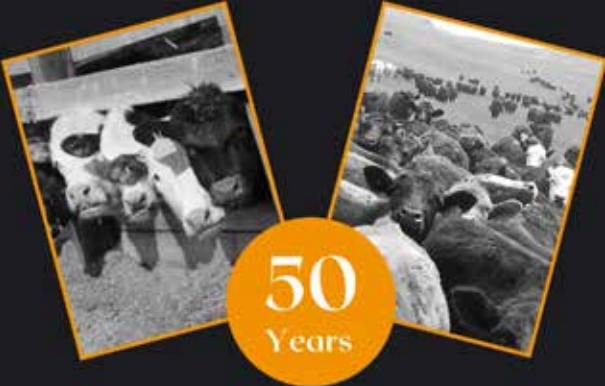
Feedlot tour with Hon. Marie-Claude Bibeau



that had been built by true innovators in the cattle industry," she says. "I guess I was fortunate to grow up among spirited prairie women: my grandmother ran a broiler, and egg operation; my aunt ran a dairy farm; my mom had commercial cattle – all leaders in a time when women were less likely to be in those positions. **I learned early that anything is possible with commitment and vision. My advice is that you don't need a leadership position to lead. Find your voice and share it respectfully, and opportunities will come.**"


**ACFA's key priorities looking forward include:**

- (Working through NCFCA) provide input / influence on federal policy and regulation to enhance the Canadian competitiveness of the cattle feeding sector;
- Increase relations within members' operations to include family members, generations and farm roles and occupations;
- Partner with stakeholders to increase producer engagement, awareness, leadership and mentorship opportunities;
- Increase opportunities to tell feeders' stories.



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Jacob Bueckert, Chair

Expect the environment, sustainability and labour to remain top of mind into the future.

“Government consultations seem to be coming fast and furious. They’re making decisions in multiple departments that don’t seem to connect with the other departments. We have a government that I don’t think necessarily fully understands the realities of agriculture. I’m not talking about specific issues, because there are many, but I think that going forward we’re going to have to pay a lot – a lot – of attention to the regulatory side of the business environment,” says Tranberg.

Both Tranberg and Bueckert are optimistic about the future, thanks to the enduring commitment of ACFA’s board, the resilience and support of its membership, the growing capacity of its staff, and very strong relationships with all levels of government.

“We’re in a super strong position going forward. We’re stronger than

ever. We’re ready to tackle whatever the future holds,” she says.

**“The important thing is that we continue to inspire our kids to want to be part of this amazing industry,” says Bueckert. “As long as we have another generation wanting to step up, we’re in a good position for the future.”**

### It’s All About the People

ACFA has overcome many challenges and risen to many opportunities over the years thanks to the commitment – both to the industry and to the organization – of those who step up to lead.

“As much as our board members compete with each other in the marketplace, they still work as a unit as a board. They’ve always been supportive and generous with their time, and the chairs have always, always made themselves available. And they’ve understood governance – they trusted and respected management,” says Walton.

“The dedication of the people who step up to join the board is incredible,” adds Tranberg. “Other organizations offer pay for people to sit on boards. Ours is a completely voluntary association. They put in time and effort only because they believe in the feeding industry and in working together to promote and build it.”

ACFA’s staff has also proven commitment far outside of typical employees.

“I can’t say enough about my team. I’m honoured to work with people who invest so much every day,” says Tranberg.

Ultimately, ACFA exists to serve its members. Its members, Tranberg says, are some of the most incredible men and women in agriculture.

**“Quite often, through all these multiple crises, I go to our members and say, ‘Honest to goodness, why are you in this business? Prices have crashed, feeders haven’t really made money in five years.’ It comes down to resilience and passion. Those are the two words that set feeders apart,” concluded Tranberg.**

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