



CANADIAN CATTLEMEN'S ASSOCIATION

BRIEF TO THE HOUSE OF COMMONS STANDING COMMITTEE
ON NATURAL RESOURCES REGARDING
THE STUDY ON LOW CARBON AND RENEWABLE FUELS INDUSTRY IN CANADA

JUNE 8, 2021

On behalf of the 60,000 beef producers across Canada, the Canadian Cattlemen's Association (CCA) is pleased for the opportunity to contribute to the House of Commons Standing Committee on Natural Resources (RNNR) study on low carbon and renewable fuels industry in Canada. CCA wants to draw your attention to the important role agriculture plays in meeting Canada's environmental goals and how current government policies being put forward on low carbon and renewable fuels industry may have unintended negative consequences that jeopardize meeting these goals. Specifically, we have concerns with certain federal environmental policies that could reduce the vital environmental benefits of agricultural production, including the draft Clean Fuel Standard (CFS) and its potential to drive conversion of grasslands and wetlands. In addition to the CFS, we have concerns about other environmental policies, such as carbon offsets and irrigation projects that, if not managed correctly, could also drive land conversion.

Conservation of native grasslands is essential in helping Canada store carbon as well as achieve its Target 1 goals. Yet, continued loss and threat to these grasslands will make this more challenging. The Canadian beef industry is working in partnership with ENGOs to conserve native grasslands—none of us can do it on our own and the conservation efforts are more impactful with everybody working collaboratively. According to new science led by Nature United and sixteen other research institutions, avoided conversion of grasslands is the single highest opportunity for soil carbon storage and the number one priority for nature-based solutions.¹

The agricultural sector has tremendous capacity to help Canada meet its carbon storage and greenhouse gas (GHG) emission reduction targets through varied practices. Protecting wetlands, maintaining native grasslands and residual cropped landscapes, rotational grazing, zero tillage and establishment of perennial cover are all important practices that sequester carbon and provide critical ecological services to Canada.

Canada's beef industry is the single largest Canadian protector of the quickly disappearing native grasslands, which is Canada's most threatened terrestrial ecosystem. Estimates show less than 20% of native grasslands remain, home to thousands of plant, animal and insect species. According to the 2019 State of Canada's Birds Report, grassland birds have declined by 57% since the 1970s and many other species that rely on native grasslands are declining. The report specifically notes that beneficial grazing on public and private lands is critical for the creation and maintenance of grassland bird habitat.

The Canadian beef industry has created ambitious environmental targets to meet by 2030 and is working collectively with industry and ENGO partners to achieve these goals. Related to GHG emissions and carbon sequestration, our goal is to safeguard the existing 1.5 billion tonnes of carbon stored on lands managed with beef cattle, sequester an additional 3.4 million tonnes of carbon every year and reduce primary production GHG emission intensity by 33%. On land use and biodiversity, our goal is to maintain the 35 million acres of native grasslands in the care of beef producers by focusing on economic viability of producers and supporting programs that incentivize conservation in collaboration with Canadian crop groups. For more details on our goals and how the industry will work to achieve them, please visit www.beefstrategy.com.

Collectively, CCA and our environmental partners are concerned that the CFS may have unintended consequences of causing increased conversion of native grasslands and wetlands.

¹ <https://www.natureunited.ca/what-we-do/our-priorities/innovating-for-climate-change/natural-climate-solutions/>

The CFS as currently written does not effectively safeguard native grasslands and wetlands from conversion to meet the rising market demand this regulation will create. Land conversion is a critical source of GHG emissions and is an overall concern within sustainable agriculture. Further, Canada is the only G7 country that does not have a complete inventory of our wetland assets, which impairs the effective rollout and successful impact of nature-based climate solutions. Canada also does not have an adequate inventory of native grasslands. This situation makes it impossible to determine whether the CFS will, in the balance, increase or decrease GHG emissions.

CCA is asking the Federal Government to put levels of protection to effectively benchmark and protect wetlands, native grasslands and other at-risk ecosystems to reduce the risk of land conversion, whether through the CFS or through another government mechanism.

CCA welcomes the recent environment announcements in Budget 2021, which demonstrates agriculture will play an important role in helping Canada achieve its environmental goals. We note the Budget included land conservation efforts and it is important that native grasslands, that are such a vital part of the working landscape, are included in these policies. The beef industry looks forward to being a partner of the government as these policies and programs are developed to ensure there are not unintended consequences for the environment.

Thank you for your thoughtful consideration and if you would like more information, we would be pleased for the opportunity to speak to the Committee in more detail.

About the Canadian Cattlemen's Association

The Canadian Cattlemen's Association represents Canada's 60,000 beef farms, ranches and feedlots. Founded by producers and led by a producer-elected board of directors, CCA works to address issues that concern Canada's beef producers. CCA's vision is to have a dynamic, profitable Canadian beef industry with high-quality beef products recognized as the most outstanding by customers at home and around the world.

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