



Canadian Cattlemen's Association

Information bulletin

Canadian cattle: Their role in caring for a sustainable Earth

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Calgary, AB - When it comes to the environment, according to cattle producers - Canadian cattle have a bum rap. Contrary to reports, Canadian livestock make only a minor contribution to Canada's greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions and energy use. Actually, cattle play an essential role in sustainable agriculture.

Canadian cattle utilize natural resources very efficiently and cattle producers continuously look for ways to increase that efficiency. Good management of Canada's approximate 21 million hectares of pastureland is one of those ways. Not only do pastures support food production, but they provide wildlife habitat and serve an important role in GHG reductions. In some cases pastureland stores carbon more efficiently than trees.

Pastures can exist where our food crops can't - on land that is too steep or cold or inaccessible to farm machinery. Pasture grasses play a significant role in feeding us. In Canada, since nearly one third of Canada's agricultural land is unsuitable for crop production, utilizing it as pasture to raise cattle enables this land to still contribute to food production.

More environmentally friendly than most other forms of producing food, properly managed cattle pasture lands control erosion and enrich the soil. Planted grasses are often used to rehabilitate soils where crops have grown. It is precisely because of these benefits and more that cattle play such a pivotal role in our food supply. Without cattle those lands would not contribute to our food supply.

For nearly 20 years, producers worked hard to reduce the environmental footprint of Canadian agriculture by implementing best management practices to improve efficiency and reduce environmental impact. These practices include improving the diets of farm animals, selectively breeding for animals which use their diets more efficiently and improving animal health – all factors that contribute to the reduction of GHG emissions. Better management practices have lowered the number of cattle required to produce the high-quality protein consumers require. In addition, as stewards of the land, many producers adopt environmental farm plans tailored to their specific operations to enhance the environmental sustainability of their operations.

Meanwhile the investments made in new technologies and agricultural research will certainly yield an even more sustainable future with cattle. They play a significant part in the burgeoning biogas industry; making it possible to turn manure, already a valuable soil amendment, into a renewable source of energy.

When it comes to environmentally-sustainable food production, let's reflect on the contributions the lowly Canadian cow makes to the environment and feeding the world. To learn more about cattle and the environment see the attached backgrounder or visit www.cattle.ca. Find out how Canada's cattle producers are true stewards of our environment.

- 30 -

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