

**My Place in the Beef Industry and My Viewpoints Taken Away
from the International Livestock Congress-Calgary**

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The International Livestock Congress-Calgary event was a four day trip. For me, it was my first trip out of the United States, which was an experience all of its own merit. Beyond that, the experience of meeting other US, Canadian, and international students was amazing, but this was just the tip of the iceberg. The second day of the trip was filled with beef tours and introductions to industry professionals. This was a preface to all of the exposure and experience I would go through on Friday (the third day of the trip) as this was the day for the actual congress and going to the Calgary Stampede grounds. Saturday morning (the final day) topped everything off. The students were invited to a wrap-up breakfast with the congress speakers, Canadian beef producers, and Canadian beef association representatives. Considering all that was packed into a four day trip in a new location, this trip, experience, and exposure was much more than I could have ever anticipated or expected.

People continuously say that the students you are going to school with or meet at different conventions are going to be the industry professionals that you will either be working alongside or competing with in the future. This is all so true. I am always striving to build those positive connections with the other students within my own university, but to develop contacts and connections with students from other universities throughout the United States and Canada is even more tremendous. This four-day trip was a perfect opportunity for doing just that. Although all of us were interested in the beef industry, we each came from different backgrounds to get where we are now. We each also have different perspectives on what we wish to do professionally in the future that may lead us down varying paths. I personally believe having the opportunity to meet

the range of students that attended the congress will be an asset to my future aspirations and being able to continue having these connections will be a tremendous benefit.

Networking, networking, and more networking with industry professionals is very important, just like everyone keeps on saying. Exposure is all in the name of the game. The more exposure you can give yourself to people, places, locations, and experiences will always have a benefit to your professional success no matter how good it may seem at the time. Everyone has different perspectives on the beef industry and life in general. This congress gave me the perfect opportunity to interact with industry professionals and producers whom are either directly or indirectly involved in the beef industry. Obtaining their varying perspectives and views from Canada, the US, and across the world was very intriguing.

The main focus that I can say of which I obtained from the Congress itself would be to think in a more wholeistic, global sense. The Congress brought in industry professionals from across the world to discuss international trade, economic outlooks, the feed grain market, demographics of rural Canadian lifestyles, eating quality of beef products, and finally suggestions of how producers can perhaps change their perspectives and operations to improve their outlook and position within the beef industry for the future.

The one take-home message that I have coming from Alanna Koch's talk would be that the developing countries overseas are likely going to be the fastest growing countries in the future to consume beef. Perhaps, this is where the U.S. needs to direct their focus to and find the niche markets these countries have in terms of possibly purchasing more beef from North America. Her three missions included: our future is

global, we all have a stake in these trade negotiations, and we all need to be involved together summarizes the needs that everyone should have within the beef industry. I believe we should take these mission statements and run with them. What can we do as individuals to better our production and position within the global beef industry?

Glen Hodgson and Dennis B. McGiven's talks can be effectively discussed together. The main objectives from these two presenters are that the Canadian economy and beef prices are all reflective with the U.S.'s prices. Energy prices and property prices are increasing substantially in both countries. Labor costs are an increasing concern within Alberta as the oil industry continues to increase and commercialization blossoms. This growth takes away from labor opportunities for beef producers. These cattle producers are practically forced to pay more for their hired labor in order to get the necessary things done and to keep employees within the business from going elsewhere. Additionally, both speakers discussed how the Canadian beef industry is growing at a faster rate than it is within the U.S. This has been primarily due to an increase in packing plant capacity and improved trade agreements with other countries for Canada.

The economic perspective Brant Randles presented upon the global feed grain market was very enlightening for me. He first mentioned how China has a tremendous land opportunity for expanding their feed grain production, but their consumption is merely not what the U.S. has for grain consumption. China could become a major competitor if given an increase in demand for grain utilization with the North American countries. Most of Brant's talk turned to the impact of ethanol plants on grain demand both in the U.S. and Canada. First and foremost, ethanol plants play a direct role in the demand for corn demand in the U.S. He discussed how the building of ethanol plants in

the U.S. has dramatically increased and ethanol production has tripled within just recent years. There is a crop production increase expected, but utilization of grains by ethanol plants will affect the crop production and prices greatly. Although Canada does not have the ethanol plant production capacity like the U.S. does, there is an expectation for plant capacity to increase, which will in turn affect the crop prices and production to an extent.

Doug Horner then offered his personal insight into Alberta and Canada's outlook for the beef industry. He believed grass root (local) partnerships are the key basis for sharing importance and for producers finding their niche in the marketplace. He hit home when he said that BSE will be a big push for obtaining more traceability compliance for the live animal, to the carcass, and into the homeowner's kitchen. I believe this is the haunting and reactive concern that producers need to accept. Traceability needs for the global marketplace will likely become a reality and a focus attention site that local producers should adapt to readily.

The next presentation by David Baxter may have been the most unique and different talks of the entire day. He offered some facts, suggestions, and potential solutions to personnel management for labor workers and business professionals within the beef industry. Although many beef producers are not particularly fond of the increasing immigration work force that has entered into the U.S. and Canada, they have been a major source of labor for beef operations when young people have left rural communities. He said that we merely needed to get out of denial and admit that we have a labor shortage now and this will continue into the future. He offered two messages that I found very interesting and these can be looked upon as mere statements or producers can view these as points for changing their production. First, increasing participation,

population, and productivity are all necessary and none is sufficient. I take this to mean that unless we do not include all three of these aspects into one common goal and only focus on one thing, we will never achieve our ultimate production capacity and fulfillment. Second, perhaps the participation among people is due to these people believing that their lifestyle comes with their work rather than to revolve their lifestyle around their work. This offers a unique perspective that as beef entrepreneurs, we may want to encourage among our own employees. We should not build a gate to keep people out of an operation, but rather run the operation like a football team and recruit people.

Bernie Bindon then discussed the role of Australia to the world's beef industry. Although Australia only contributes 2.3% of the world's cattle numbers, their trade accounts for 23% of the world beef trade. As a general figure, Australia is also now feeding 2.5 million head of cattle in feedlots. He then moved into discussing how we need to put more effort into focusing on science as a means to guarantee eating quality such as conception, genetics, nutrition, and slaughtering factors. The industry should focus more attention on the biology behind marbling, tenderness, and feed efficiency in terms of technology based around genetic markers. Mr. Bindon said that the genetic correlation for marbling based on pasture finishing cattle is 0.31, while the correlation for grain finishing cattle is 0.42. However, he said that if an animal is supposed to marble and is given the opportunity to do so, then that particular correlation is 1.0. He then focused on how the LD shear force values for meat are highly negatively correlated with an animal's flight time and temperament. The main message coming from this presentation was if we as an industry can make gene discoveries and detect gene markers

for performance and carcass quality traits, then we have the potential for making large production improvements.

A critical look on the beef industry compared to the other meat industries was the last topic which was presented by David Hughes. There is currently a very tough market for purchasing groceries. The U.S. has steady meat and beef consumption. However, most countries overseas choose to consume pork, then chicken, followed by fish and seafood, then the list has to be skipped several rankings to find beef consumed. This sends a meaningful message to beef producers in North America. We must be consciously aware of these haunting facts and address them as such. Acknowledging our stand for beef consumed in other countries upon beef trade is important, and the next step would be to analyze how we can potentially overcome this. We also need to address the demands consumers now desire besides low meat prices such as: environmentally friendly products, sustainability, GMO status, animal welfare friendly, and fair trade. We should also relate these desires to the simple fact that the income in developing countries is directly proportional to beef consumption by people in those countries. Perhaps, this combination is conflicting and it may not be possible to achieve, but we must consider the needs and desires of our consumers as they are the primary influencers on beef demand. The bottom line is consumers need consistently great tasting and affordable food products that have impeccable safety and integrity with a convenience to buy, prepare, consume, and clean-up after a meal.

Saturday morning's wrap-up breakfast session may have been the most intriguing session for me. The topic was on biofuels, particularly ethanol plants and how these affect the beef industry in both Canada and the U.S. This was particularly interesting for

me as my graduate school research has focused on the nutritional value of byproducts that are produced from these ethanol plants to beef cattle. This particular session was very laid back in which industry speakers and producers were giving their viewpoints and opinions, concerns, and futuristic perspectives on biofuels. One question: what will it take to build Canada's bioeconomy? The combined answer by several speakers was a consensus of entrepreneurs, public support, and a combined effort among ethanol plant builders and cattle producers. I completely agree with this compliance. In order to make ethanol production work properly, it is best if these people can work hand in hand with livestock producers to sell their byproduct feeds to benefit cattle production and performance. I am personally familiar with ethanol being produced from corn, but it was discussed that ethanol can also be made from wheat and triticale as there are not any particular crop specifications to convert crop energy into ethanol production. A suggested energy saving alley included using manure as energy for an ethanol plant and make this a full loop system. One increasing topic of discussion included what impact ethanol production has and will continue to have on corn prices. Corn demand tends to increase as a corn production location gets closer to an ethanol plant. This has both an impact on the price of corn that an ethanol plant is purchasing it at and what cattle producers must pay for their corn at the varying locations away from an ethanol plant. All of these factors just mentioned are increasing topics of discussion and concerns we are facing in the Midwest U.S. The byproducts produced from ethanol production in the U.S. are having a substantial positive impact on cattle production and performance. We are finding that distiller's grains are improving cattle gains and efficiency when fed to both grazing and finishing beef cattle. I look forward to taking the viewpoints discussed

at this session and find different ways that have not been previously pursued for benefiting our beef producers that have the advantage of being located close to ethanol plants.

This four-day trip to Canada including the one-day congress had a tremendous impact on me. I would say that I have usually been more traditional thinking with my family's beef operation. However, I am realizing from being in both graduate school and attending the International Livestock Congress-Calgary that beef producers, including myself, need to think about how they can find their niche and think more globally. The beef industry is an ever evolving corporation. Everyone involved in it, being directly or indirectly, needs to always think about how their production, the government, and economic changes, no matter how big or small, can and may affect them. It is simply up to the individual as to how they deal, adapt, accept, or actively participate in these changes. In order to keep up with the quick changing times in this field, I would recommend the beef entrepreneur or industry professional to accept these changes with open arms and see how they can benefit to the ever evolving industry.

Personally, I plan to take the topics of discussion by speakers and producers to shape my potential future in the beef industry after finishing graduate school by attempting to better serve producers that are open to new ideas and perspectives by enhancing their production. I believe that there is a current tremendous opportunity within the beef industry where we can improve our genetic potential with scientific means on carcass merit quality and overall female performance. Combining this potential with the unique industry leaders' and the students' contacts that I made while networking and attending the congress, I plan on changing my future personal plans in the beef industry. I have the

tendency to get sucked into the day-to-day activities within my graduate program and to the scientific processes, but I continuously realize that I need to get out more, visit with more producers and industry professionals in order to gain the industry's perspective on beef production and not just the viewpoints I get from being in graduate school. I am now considering the option of being more of a wholeistic beef consultant by tying together genetics, reproduction, nutrition, and meat quality to obtain how these factors within the beef industry interact with each other to better enhance overall cattle performance and economic returns, which in turns benefits the everyday consumer with their beef consumption. Now, I am really looking forward to the future and what active role I can interplay within the beef industry where I can help many people obtain their potential production.