

August 27, 2006

International Livestock Congress, Calgary

By: Clayton Koopmann

I recently attended the International Livestock Congress hosted by the Canadian Cattlemen's Association, Calgary Stampede, and the International Stockmen's Education Foundation in Calgary, Alberta. At first glance the program sounded too good to be true, however, the closer it got to the trip, the more hesitant I became. I had never traveled to another country, I knew absolutely nobody there, and I would be making the trip alone. I thought about it and decided that this was a once in a lifetime opportunity and I packed my bags for the trip.

Once I arrived in Calgary, there was a stranger holding a sign with my name on it so I approached the man and he tried to carry my bags for me. They were my bags and I didn't want to make somebody else tote them around the airport, so I just carried them myself. We left the airport in a fancy car and headed south to the Deerfoot Inn and Casino. When we arrived I had a hotel room waiting there for me and went upstairs to unpack. I returned to the ground floor where I met the other students in the ILC program and we proceeded to the restaurant for a nice dinner. As I mingled and talked with other students I became extremely comfortable and learned that a number of the other students were friends with people I know from back home. What a small world. I even knew the student that traveled to Canada all the way from Brazil.

Following dinner we proceeded to the dance hall in the casino where we were serenaded by a band that got us up dancing and burning wholes in our shoes. We swam

in the pool for a while and tested out the large waterslide as well. After a lengthy evening sampling Canadian beverages, swimming, and dancing we headed to our rooms and went to sleep for the night in anticipation of what the next day had in store for us.

Thursday morning we awoke bright and early and met in the hotel lobby to collect our box breakfasts before boarding a bus and heading south across some of the most beautiful country I had ever seen and arriving at the Cargill's meat processing facility. Upon arrival we were quickly shrouded in protective clothing (hardhats, raincoats, rubber boots, and hairnets) before being led through a lengthy tour of the facilities. Once the tour had concluded, we sat down in a room and listened to a presentation from the Canadian Cattle Identification Agency. Being actively involved in the beef cattle industry, this presentation really peaked my interest. The United States is currently working on a national livestock identification program and it was extremely interesting to learn of the trials and tribulations the program went through in Canada and the success they are now having with their program. I learned a lot from this presentation and was able to relay much of the information to my state Cattlemen's Association President and Vice President.

Following our stop at the Cargill plant we attended a lunch and presentation at the Round T Ranch. The presentation and information presented was extremely useful and was got an understanding of the scale of beef production in Canada as well as the short and long-term trends of the industry. The management and production tactics utilized by producers in the Alberta were similar to those utilized by producers in the United States,

however, I was able to pick up on some interesting differences. Following lunch we proceeded to the Western Feedlots facility where we were given a comprehensive tour and lengthy speech about feeding and feed rations, animal husbandry and management, and livestock identification and monitoring. Visiting the facilities was beneficial because we got to see the quality of cattle that Canada produces and it was interesting to see the facilities utilized for handling cattle there. Once again, a number of differences arose in the construction of pens and corrals compared to those I am accustomed to in the United States. We departed Western Feedlots and took a quick tour of the Tongue Creek Feeders feedlot where we discussed the opportunities associated with composting animal waste and converting it into quality soil and fertilizer for growing crops. Thursday evening we arrived back at the Deerfoot Inn and went out for an evening on the town.

Friday morning came way too early and we boarded a bus and headed for the Palomino Room at the Calgary Stampede grounds. We were given a packet of information and proceeded to listen to a number of speeches throughout the day. I found a number of the presentations to be extremely informative and educational. The presentations by business leaders from around the globe helped me to gain a global perspective of the agriculture industry as well as gaining valuable insight into the abundant opportunities the livestock industry has to offer. Following the day of presentations we were given the opportunity to network with producers, policy makers, marketers, educators, and other industry leaders while enjoying cheese and wine. I particularly enjoyed the presentation by David Baxter about 'rural human resource challenges'. He was entertaining and the information was eye opening.

Following the Congress we left the Palomino Room and were given a tour of the rodeo grounds where we ate a good dinner and settled in to watch the chuck wagon racing. This was really fun for me because I have always wanted to attend the Calgary Stampede but have never had the opportunity. Following the chuck races and a performance by The Young Canadians we boarded a bus and headed back to the hotel for some much needed rest.

Saturday morning found us up and about early as we gathered downstairs for breakfast and to listen in on a round table discussion with a number of industry leaders. The discussion was educational and it allowed me to gain some knowledge about a number of the issues that are affecting the agricultural industry in Canada as well as worldwide. It was interesting to learn that agricultural producers globally are facing similar issues from environmental regulations to health and identification issues. Following the roundtable discussion we said our goodbyes and split up, some heading back to the Stampede, and others heading for the airport.

My original doubts and worries about visiting Canada alone were quickly eliminated within the first hour I was in Calgary. The hospitality and friendliness of the residents there was really a surprise to me. The introduction and dinner with the other students was a great idea and it allowed us to get to know each other and bond with one another. Following the dinner with the other students, I felt at home and knew that the trip was going to be a lot of fun.

Through the presentations, tours, meetings, and networking I did in Calgary I was able to collect a vast wealth of knowledge about the international livestock industry. The information that I collected and the contacts I made will be extremely beneficial to me in my future career as an agriculturalist. I have taken all of the information I collected on the trip and compiled it into a report that I plan to share with the members of the Young Cattlemen's Association in California as well as interested students at the University of California, Davis where I attend school.

I am currently beginning my fifth year of college in Davis and I am majoring agricultural management and rangeland resources. I am planning a career in rangeland management, consulting, and conservation. I am a fourth generation beef cattle producer will continue to raise beef cattle for the rest of my life. The information I collect now will be with me forever to share with other agriculturalists to help protect and improve the agricultural industry on a local, state, and national level.

I thoroughly enjoyed my trip to Calgary and I would like to move there following graduation from UC Davis in 2007. The numerous job opportunities, the aesthetics of the land, and the hospitality of the residents in Alberta have influenced me a great deal. I would like to thank the Canadian Cattlemen's Association, the Calgary Stampede, and the International Stockmen's Education Foundation for hosting us as well as Diane Rushforth for arranging everything. The program was exceptional and I would recommend it to anybody with an interest in agriculture.

