

Submission to Rural Development Action Plan Consultations February 2026

Background

The National Cattle Feeders' Association (NCFA) works to improve the growth, sustainability, and competitiveness of the cattle feeding sector in Canada.

Canada's beef industry contributes \$9.7 billion in farm cash receipts annually, contributes \$21.8 billion to national GDP annually and accounts for 347,000 jobs, each one of which supports another 3.9 jobs elsewhere in the economy.

As a vital part of Canada's agriculture industry, the beef sector strengthens Canadian rural communities. Strategic government investment would enable the sector to further drive economic potential across rural Canada. To that end, NCFA applauds the federal government's initiative to develop a Rural Development Action Plan and respectfully submits our recommendations.

Labour

A shortage of labour continues to be the single largest barrier to growth and sustainability of Canadian agriculture, costing the industry and rural communities millions in lost potential every year. In the beef sector, this labour shortage manifests both on-farm and in beef processing facilities, making it exceedingly challenging to grow rural communities.

Despite best efforts, agriculture simply cannot secure sufficient domestic labour. This shortage forces farmers to depend on foreign workers. However, many recent changes to labour and immigration policy have and will continue to result in further challenges on this front.

Farmers want to hire Canadians first. However, the reality is that many Canadians 1) do not want to live in rural communities, 2) are not aware of the career opportunities in rural Canada including agriculture.

NCFA welcomes increasing the Canadian workforce on farms, but our own citizens are reluctant to live and work in rural Canada due to limited services in rural communities, i.e. reliable and affordable internet, career opportunities for spouses, sports and recreation activities for family, day care, schools, health care, housing, places of worship, etc.

The solution to building a reliable work force in rural Canada lies both in easing access to foreign labour and building the domestic workforce. The sector will still need foreign labour to supplement a growing domestic work force.

Moving forward, as part of a Rural Development Action Plan, **NCFA recommends the following:**

- Develop a sector-specific agricultural labour strategy that acknowledges that seasonal and year-round labour require different approaches and that foreign labour will continue to be required for the foreseeable future.
- Invest in services (as outlined above) for rural communities - communities that do not have the tax-base to deliver these services but cannot grow without them.
- Invest in a promotional campaign about careers in rural-based sectors including agriculture.

Rural Infrastructure

Rural infrastructure is much more than universal broadband. It includes other economically productive assets such as roads and bridges. While the government invests heavily in national trade corridors, there is a significant gap when it comes to the rural roads and bridges required to move agriculture products from the farm-gate to these national corridors.

Small rural communities do not have the tax-base to appropriately build and maintain roads and bridges that are so critical for the agriculture sector and the movement of our food in Canada. Some rural communities have implemented 'livestock taxes' to address the shortfall. This is not the path to rural economic growth as it puts our own farmers at a competitive disadvantage.

Compounding this situation is the impact of severe weather in recent years on our roads and bridges, increasing the urgency for new investment.

Moving forward, as part of a Rural Development Action Plan, **NCFA recommends the following:**

- Create a federal infrastructure funding envelope dedicated to rural infrastructure and the transportation needs of agriculture.
- Expand the focus of rural infrastructure beyond broadband to include essential investments in hard economic assets such as rural roads, bridges, and local transportation networks.

Creating Communities that Welcome Agriculture

As urban boundaries expand, Canada is facing a clashing of urban and rural priorities. Canadians who may not be aware of the economic and social contributions of agriculture to their communities are protesting the expansion and existence of agriculture operations near their homes. They raise concerns about smell, dust, and road use, all of which are the realities and economic backbone of rural life. This can lead to frustration and anger which contributes to heightened polarization on many fronts. Those who work in the agriculture and agri-food industry know this rural/urban divide too well.

NCFA believes that there needs to be efforts made to close this divide, to create a rural Canada that welcomes agriculture investments, and realize the social and economic benefits that agriculture provides to those communities. The solution must balance municipal growth with the viability of the livestock sector.

Moving forward, as part of a Rural Development Action Plan, **NCFA recommends the following:**

- Invest in public trust and education about the agriculture sector through programs which propel messaging to schools and the general public.
- Create an investment tax credit for rural businesses which employ local residents.