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## Submission to Building Canada Strong for All – Powered by Canada’s Workers Consultations

To: Honourable John Zerucelli, Secretary of State (Labour)  
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From: National Cattle Feeders’ Association

Date: May 15, 2026

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The National Cattle Feeders’ Association (NCFA) welcomes the current consultation process being undertaken by the federal government to modernize Canada’s labour relations framework.

NCFA is the voice of Canada’s cattle feeders and works to improve the growth, sustainability, and competitiveness of cattle production across 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 the government modernizes its labour relations framework it is essential to consider the perspectives of stakeholders that rely on federally regulated labour and services. For the agriculture sector, the reliance on federally regulated rail and port services cannot be underestimated. Producers and processors depend on a smooth and well-functioning transportation system to move livestock, crops, inputs, equipment and finished products both within Canada and to/from global destinations.

The agriculture and agri-food sector is a critical contributor to the government’s economic and trade diversification strategy. However, the sector is regularly under significant strain as it manages trade and market shifts along with increasing weather events (i.e. drought, flood, wildfires). Labour strikes within the transportation system are a devastating blow that the sector simply cannot withstand - the impact of these labour distributions show up in the form of threats on domestic food security, food affordability, farm viability, animal welfare, rural economies and retention of global customers.

In the case of rail service, labour disputes have the potential to negatively impact the welfare of Canada’s livestock. The Canadian beef industry relies heavily upon the timely rail delivery of feed ingredients to feed a national herd that consists of millions of animals. With limited on-farm storage options, producers meticulously plan their feed supplies on a weekly basis, aligning with rail schedules. Their cattle are on a very specific feeding schedule and the wellbeing of animals is at risk if there are even brief delays in feed delivery by rail. Delivery of animal feed is, without question, essential.

For example, there is over one million head of cattle on feed in Alberta and Saskatchewan. One rail car is estimated to feed approximately 8,000 head for 1 day; therefore Alberta alone requires 9 – 10 trains per week. It is estimated that over 1,000 super-B trucks would be needed per week to replace the volume of feed grain that is brought in by CP trains - an option which is not feasible given the chronic shortage of truck drivers. Railway service in the west operates as an effective monopoly. With no alternative, railways become an essential service for farmers.

In addition, rail and port strikes of federally regulated workers have profound short and long-term impacts on our global trading relationships – a primary focus of the current government. The agriculture sector takes years to secure global customers for Canadian food products, but the customers expect on-time and reliable delivery of their products. When transportation strikes delay the delivery of these products, our creditability with the customers is eroded, and contracts may be put at risk or cancelled. Canada's economy cannot function with this ad hoc approach to essential rail and port services.

NCFA recognizes the right of Canadians to strike and the workers of federally regulated transportation services provide an invaluable service to our sector every day. However, if we want to grow our agriculture sector, be globally competitive, protect animal welfare, deliver domestic food security and diversify our global trading market, the Government of Canada must declare rail and port an essential service when transporting agriculture inputs and products.

Thank you for the careful consideration of our perspective as you move forward in modernizing the government's labour relations framework. We encourage you to find a balance of protecting worker's rights while keeping Canada's economy growing.