



OPERATIONAL INDEPENDENCE OF AFSC UNDER SUSPICION

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After weeks of speaking to elected officials and bureaucrats, the beef industry finally has an announcement on the AgriRecovery support but are still waiting on details while more water dries up and more feed is disappearing. "In all our meetings with AFSC, they have been receptive of our input but it seems their hands are tied to take any action," says WSGA president Callum Sears.

"We are in an emergency situation. Throughout trying to get the support we need to minimize the liquidation of the cattle herd, timelines have been stretched to the point of extreme stress for producers despite repeated statements on the need for urgency," says Sears. "It might just be conjecture but it does make one question the integrity of the system. Why has this taken so long in the face of how desperate things are getting?"

Alberta Financial Services Corporation (AFSC) is a Crown corporation that is governed by a private sector Board of Directors. The board's job is to provide 'essential oversight'. According to their mandate, 'AFSC must have a level of operational independence from the Government in making the day-to-day operation and management decisions'. Since October 2020 the interim chair of the AFSC board has been the Deputy Minister of Agriculture and Forestry.

The 'operational independence' guaranteed by a private sector board is to adequately 'ensure the agency's programs and services are delivered effectively and meet the needs of Albertans'. "To ensure effective delivery or, at the very least, to retain client confidence, the chair cannot be one whose day job depends on the Agriculture Minister," says Sears.

"We are extremely grateful for the announcements from both the provincial and federal government in their commitment of the \$200 per head support. It does help, but the brutal truth is that Canfax projects that the average beef producer will have \$535 of extraordinary costs per head this year. There will be liquidation of the cattle herd even with the support," says Sears. "The \$200 per head is the bare minimum and with \$106 being a receipted program, it complicates the participation exponentially for the beef producer. It's a lot of effort and paperwork for a relatively little bit of money."

It's not expected that there will be any change to the receipt requirements for the second payment despite the concerns expressed by industry groups. "The government is under pressure with international trade agreements and the need to be accountable with tax dollars but AgriRecovery is a blunt instrument. Delivering such a program with high detail requirements makes a problematic rollout which will bring further stress and hardship to producers; some to the point of not even participating," says Sears.

Established in 1896, Western Stock Growers' Association is a beef producer organization driven by province-wide voluntary membership. WSGA's main priority is protection of the livestock producer and the rangelands they operate on through advocacy. WSGA encourages interaction within industry leaders that promotes education and helps define philosophical issues in agriculture.

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