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National Cattle Feeders' Association - Written Submission
Standing Committee on Transport, Infrastructure and Communities
Anticipated Labour Shortage in the Canadian Transportation Sector

November 4, 2022

On behalf of the National Cattle Feeders' Association (NCFA), I am pleased to provide this written submission to the Committee for consideration on its study on the '*Anticipated Labour Shortage in the Canadian Transportation Sector*'.

Who is NCFA?

The National Cattle Feeders' Association is the voice of Canada's cattle feeders. We work to improve the growth, sustainability, and competitiveness of the beef sector in Canada so as to provide a safe, high quality and accessible beef supply to Canadians.

Cattle feeders are a critical part of the beef value chain. Feedlots receive cattle from cow/calf operations when the animal is between 600 to 800 pounds and feed the cattle a high-energy diet to promote weight gain. When the cattle reach a weight of 1,200 to 1,400 pounds, they are sent for processing.

Canadian farmers compete globally and require governments to maintain a business environment that fosters success. Canada's access to labour and strong transportation infrastructure must track alongside those of our international competitors.

What are the transportation labour challenges for the agriculture sector?

Agricultural supply chains are under tremendous pressure, negatively impacting national food security.

Access to reliable transportation is one of the greatest challenges for the agriculture sector. The labour shortage is chronic and severe and makes it exceedingly difficult to maintain current beef production levels and grow our international beef exports.

It is important to understand the unique nature of live animal transportation. Cattle move across the US-Canada border daily with young cattle coming from the US to supply our farms; and finished cattle being exported to the US for processing. And within Canada, truck drivers are needed to move cattle to and from farms and processing plants; for the removal of manure; and for the transport of feed and supplies.

These drivers require specialized training to transport livestock as animal welfare is of the utmost importance. Drivers must adhere to the Canadian Food Inspection Agency's animal transport regulations, as well as safe driver regulations with respect to Electronic Logging Devices (ELDs).

With an overall shortage of truck drivers in Canada, potential entrants to the transport sector are more likely to seek trucking opportunities that do not require additional requirements of transporting livestock.

In addition to promoting to Canadians the employment opportunities in the trucking sector and subsidizing the training, the federal government must also lean into the solution through immigration. For example, truck driving should be made into a trade, complete with its own National Occupational Code (NOC). The amount of training and costs required to qualify as a licensed truck driver are significant as they are with other trades. Designating truck driving as a trade would allow current and future immigration rules to better apply to the trucking industry, which is a major labour need for agriculture in general and our sector in particular.

Cattle feeders also rely on a reliable and predictable labour force to support rail transportation. Western Canada cattle feeders rely, to a great extent, on one company – CP Rail. In Alberta, at the time of the CP strike earlier this year, there was only a one-to-two-week supply of feed grain available creating grave concern on how animals would be fed. Thankfully the strike did not last long, but it brought forward the extreme reliance we have on CP Rail. And while we recognize the right of Canadians to strike, when rail transportation is a monopoly, and animal welfare is on the line, the Government of Canada must declare rail an essential service to ensure the labour force is present to keep our animal feed supplies moving.

Additional Transportation Challenges

Of related note is the rising costs of transportation. The cost of feed is at its highest level in history and that is without factoring in increased transportation costs. The rising cost of fuel, in combination with the current price on carbon, means trucking is no longer a viable option in some areas. This situation will only worsen as rates increase. Finally, the rural nature of the industry requires proper maintenance of rural roads and bridges, yet local municipalities struggle to find funding.

The combined impact of all these challenges manifest in terms of higher production costs, lost production, lost sales, lower incomes, less investment, and overall a less competitive industry.

Recommendations

- Immediate attention needs to be given to the growing shortage of drivers in the trucking industry with particular notice of the specialized needs of the livestock sector.
- Government should promote, subsidize and streamline an efficient path for Canadians to enter the trucking industry that supports the transport needs for livestock.
- Make truck driving into a trade complete with its own National Occupational Code (NOC) to allow Canada's immigration system to play a more important role in providing a meaningful and enduring solution to labour challenges
- Railway service in the west operates as a monopoly. With no alternative, railway should be designated an essential service.
- Regulations like those for Electronic Logging Devices (ELD) need to accommodate the unique circumstances of livestock and align with regulations that govern livestock breaks during transport, thus creating a common sense approach for livestock truckers. It is also imperative that Canadian requirements around ELDs are aligned with those in the United States to ensure Canada's competitiveness.
- The rising costs of transportation and lack of labour need to be considered so the government does not put its industry at a competitive disadvantage to our competitors.
- Beyond the focus of rural broadband, agriculture requires essential investments in hard economic assets such as roads, bridges, local transportation networks, and improved rail transfer and storage facilities and infrastructure. This will create a positive working environment for the trucking industry.