

# MCEC NEWS

Manitoba Cattle Enhancement Council

FALL 2009

If you'd like to learn more about MCEC, please visit our website at [www.mancec.com](http://www.mancec.com).

## MCEC Producer Forum seeks input from cattle farmers

### Prelude to Grazing School November 30 in Brandon

We've come a long way since the BSE crisis shut the U.S. border to Canadian cattle in 2003. A lot has been learned.

There is room for real optimism for the future of the beef industry in Manitoba if we identify our common challenges and capitalize on our strengths. This fall, the Manitoba Cattle Enhancement Council will ask the province's cattle producers and other industry stakeholders to help it identify the key issues to be addressed in the years ahead.

"We've had some success in our first three years in an especially tough environment. We've invested in some new initiatives, reviewed many opportunities and lobbied hard on behalf of producers. As a result, we're closer than ever to bringing federally-certified slaughtering and processing capacity back to the province," said Chair Neil Van Ryssel. "This fall, we're looking for producers to tell us in their own words

the challenges they continue to face and how MCEC can potentially help solve those issues."

MCEC is hosting the special half day forum for producers on November 30 at the Victoria Inn in Brandon, just prior to Grazing School. The free event will feature some speakers who will address domestic and international value chain and trade initiatives. But primarily, the forum is an opportunity for producers to participate in workshops that will help guide MCEC's strategic planning and to exchange information.

"We've always done our best to meet with and listen to producers informally and at regional meetings. This is a chance for producers to have more direct input into our planning," said Kate Butler, MCEC's executive director.

MCEC continues to welcome new proposals for funding on projects that will strengthen the provincial cattle industry. The forum is an opportunity for interested proponents to learn more about MCEC's funding process.

MCEC thanks its sponsors for helping to defray the cost of the forum, including Grazing School for providing the meeting space.

### MCEC PRODUCER FORUM

November 30,  
1:30 to 6:00 p.m.

Victoria Inn  
Brandon, Manitoba

Cost: free

Register:  
(204) 452-6353 or  
[info.mcec@mts.net](mailto:info.mcec@mts.net)

Register  
Today.  
Admission  
is free.

*Building a solid future for Manitoba's beef producers*

# Keystone starts shipping beef

Keystone Processors Ltd. began shipping beef earlier this year as it completed its first phase of upgrades that will eventually see it become a fully operational, federally-inspected beef slaughtering and processing facility.

The plant has been using other provincial slaughtering plants to bring in beef for processing before selling it to meat distributors such as National Meats, Neptune Mariner, The Carver's Knife, De Luca Brothers and others. Keystone Processors beef is now being sold through grocery stores and restaurants across the province.

In August, the company launched a direct-to-consumer retail channel, selling online, by phone and in person at the Marion Street plant in Winnipeg.

Keystone Processors was formed in 2008 after MCEC spearheaded the investment in the former Maple Leaf pork plant.

"Having an organization like MCEC investing on behalf of producers is a great boost to the beef industry here," said Dave Shambrock, executive director of the Manitoba Food Processors Association. "This plant is a great sign of the growing demand for Manitoba Made food products. It's nice to see the focus on quality and food safety. It's a highly competitive

industry, but it looks like Keystone is enjoying a good start in terms of positive publicity and sales."

The beef processed in the new facility is now in more than two dozen grocery stores and some of the finest restaurants in Winnipeg. The plant is



From left: MCEC Chair Neil Van Ryssel with St. Boniface MP Shelley Glover, Keystone Processors President and CEO Kelly Penner and MCEC Executive Director Kate Butler at Keystone Processors' neighbourhood barbeque in August.

establishing itself as a reliable source for premium quality, locally-raised beef.

Another positive step forward was the introduction of the company's first Halal certified beef. Halal beef is raised and slaughtered in accordance with Muslim Shari'ah law. Some of the rules for beef to be Halal certified are: the cattle must be raised hormone-free,



must never consume animal derivatives and must be slaughtered in good health in the most humane way possible. Manitobans can now purchase Keystone Processors' Halal beef at Millad's Supermarket, 396 Notre Dame, Winnipeg's only Halal certified grocery store.

Although things are moving forward at a steady pace, there is still much work that needs to be done. The facility

still needs to complete upgrades to meet federal standards so Keystone Processors can begin selling its beef across Canada and around the world. It is also important for Keystone Processors to have the plant certified Kosher so it can begin serving this niche market in the future.

## New MCEC board

Manitoba Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Initiatives Rosann Wowchuk recently announced the appointment of a new Chair for the Manitoba Cattle Enhancement Council. Neil Van Ryssel, former Vice-Chair, takes over from Bill Uruski who decided to step down in mid May to spend more time on personal and family matters. Uruski has led the council since its inception three years ago and has been instrumental in the positive changes MCEC has brought to the Manitoba cattle industry.

"This council is important for the Manitoba cattle industry. I'm proud

that I was part of such an innovative initiative," said Uruski. "The MCEC team has worked tirelessly to get this council off the ground. It is a unique investment fund acting on behalf of producers that drives much needed new investment dollars into the cattle industry."

Van Ryssel runs a mixed dairy and grain farm near Oak Bank, Manitoba with his family. He is also the president of the Oak Bank Credit Union, chair of the Cooks Creek Conservation District and past chair of the Manitoba Rural Adaptation Council.

"Bill was an invaluable resource leading the council and I look forward to

working with the rest of council to carry on the work that he helped start," said Van Ryssel. "I am optimistic for the Manitoba beef industry as we work towards bringing new federally-inspected beef plant capacity and other value-added cattle projects to the province."

MCEC also elected member Albert Todosichuk as vice-chair and treasurer and member R. Harvey Harland as secretary. Council member Don Yanick also opted to step down this year due to family and farming commitments.

# *What's on your grill?*

## **Federal certification required for our beef industry to grow**

By Neil Van Ryssel

We're blessed in Manitoba with some of the best agricultural land in the world. We have wide open spaces, clean air and plenty of fresh water. We also have a history of being a centre of excellence in the agricultural world.

In short, you'd be hard pressed to find a better place on the planet for a cattle industry to thrive. We're working hard to help the industry turn itself around and become a success story for primary food production not just in Manitoba, but in all of the world. Make no mistake: to do that, we need federally-inspected beef slaughtering and processing plants back in this province.

Right now, our producers load their cattle onto trucks to be bounced across provincial and often national borders in one direction or another only to have the beef bounce back on other trucks to be sold in our grocery stores.

While we have a number of fine, established provincially-inspected abattoirs and processors, they can accept only a tiny fraction of our provincial herd. They can't sell outside of the province and they're shut out of the major supermarket chains. That makes us sitting ducks.

With rising feed and transportation costs, it is becoming increasingly imperative for our province to develop federally-inspected beef plant capacity. This designation from the Canadian Food Inspection Agency is needed for beef products to be exported. The old model of shipping our cattle long distances is barely, if at all, viable for producers (not to mention being bad for the environment).

That is why the Manitoba Cattle Enhancement Council was pleased to see the federal government's recently released guidelines for its \$50 million Slaughter Improvement Program emphasized boosting regional plant capacity.

We're working hard to bring new beef plant capacity to Manitoba. We believe our provincial industry needs to transform itself from being nothing more than a 'branch plant' into being a leading exporter of premium beef products to niche markets around the world.

We know, for example, that demand for high quality beef products is growing in Asian countries including China, Japan, Taiwan and Korea. At the same time, North American markets for Kosher, Halal, Organic and hormone-free natural beef are expanding too.

Manitoba has a high quality provincial herd, raised by experienced producers. Our geographic location also gives us a natural competitive advantage when it comes to shipping our products across North America and to the rest of the world. We will all benefit from increased value-added agricultural production. It means more jobs, more tax revenues, more spin-off benefits, and a diversified, healthy economy in both rural and urban locations.

As we work with the federal government to steer funding here, we urge all Manitobans to speak up and ask for quality, Manitoba beef at their stores, in their restaurants and to serve it proudly in their homes.



*Neil Van Ryssel was appointed Chair of the Manitoba Cattle Enhancement Council in Spring 2009. He operates a dairy farm near Winnipeg.*

## Thanks to Bill Uruski

Successful organizations do not simply materialize. It takes time and effort to make them function properly. It also takes leadership, which is something that the Manitoba Cattle Enhancement Council has had in spades since its inception when Bill Uruski took on the post of Chair.

As a former Manitoba agriculture minister and a farmer himself, Uruski was highly knowledgeable about the challenges facing the cattle industry. The province created MCEC to help the industry rebuild as it recovered from the devastating closure of the U.S. border following the BSE crisis of 2003.

Under his leadership, the council charted a unique course in the world of Canadian agriculture. It is a kind of venture capital fund focused solely on a single industry and funded by the producers in that industry.

Our entire council thanks Bill Uruski for his time, effort and dedication to seeing MCEC succeed.



Bill Uruski, past  
Chair of MCEC

## MCEC applauds Ottawa's support for regional packing plants

The Manitoba Cattle Enhancement Council was pleased to see that Ottawa's \$50 million pledge to support meat packing and processing facilities is intended to help regions like Manitoba.

In his June announcement, Jean-Pierre Blackburn, the minister of state for agriculture, said the program will be "addressing regional gaps in this sector by providing new marketing options and lower transportation costs in areas where limited access to meat packing and processing facilities is affecting the growth of the sector."

"This is positive for our industry both provincially and nationally," said Albert Todosichuk, vice-chair of MCEC. "Our national meat packing industry is already over concentrated in a handful of places, leaving jurisdictions like Manitoba high and dry in times of

crisis. We need to support the industry in a way that ensures it's healthy from the producers on up."

MCEC spent months discussing the merits of regional production with the federal department of agriculture, the office of the Minister of Agriculture and the offices of Manitoba Members of Parliament.

"Having regional production is good because it will stimulate the industry nationwide to produce value-added products in multiple jurisdictions for domestic and export markets," said MCEC Executive Director Kate Butler. "Our producers will benefit from increased competition as well as lower transportation costs."

The government released more details about the program recently. A link to the application is on the MCEC website at [www.mancec.com](http://www.mancec.com).

"We're extremely pleased with what we've seen so far," said Butler. "It shows that Ottawa is listening and showing leadership in delivering good policy decisions."

## MCEC welcoming new links to China

The Manitoba Cattle Enhancement Council was proud to help welcome representatives from the Harbin, China's POTA Information Consulting Co., Ltd. on their recent tour of Manitoba.

POTA was in the province to establish closer ties with Keystone Processors Ltd. and to enhance its trade to Manitoba in general. POTA has a number of business interests in Harbin, a major city of nearly 10 million people in northeastern China. It runs a large daily newspaper, and a foreign language training and vocational school.

MCEC hosted General Manager Peter Pang and International Business Development Manager Judy Pang for a visit to the council's offices before taking them on a tour of MCEC Chair Neil Van Ryssel's dairy operation east of Winnipeg.

The Pangs were reciprocating a trip that Keystone Processors' President Kelly Penner made to Harbin earlier this year to open business talks with POTA. The two companies plan to continue discussions on how they can do business in the future. The Manitoba Cattle Enhancement Council was proud to help welcome representatives from the Harbin, China's POTA Information Consulting Co., Ltd. on their recent tour of Manitoba.



Kate Butler,  
Executive Director  
of MCEC

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