



## ERIN JORDAN

Associate

With a Bachelor of Communication degree from Mount Royal University, Erin is an excellent communicator in both corporate and non-profit environments. She is well-versed in connecting rural and urban Albertans, having worked in our province's heavy industry and agriculture sectors. Erin's areas of expertise include developing fact-based key messages, event planning, and creating content to spark meaningful conversations amongst stakeholders.

Erin is well-positioned to monitor political issues. She has strong ties to the provincial and national dairy industry, and she has coordinated government relations activities on behalf of the agriculture industry.



ALBERTA COUNSEL



# AGRIBUSINESS REPORT RELEASED: WHAT WILL THE MINISTRIES GLEAN FROM THE RECOMMENDATIONS?

By Erin Jordan

The report on agrifood and agribusiness, posted on the Standing Committee on Alberta's Economic Future website on April 10, illustrates the vast potential in our province for developing agribusiness, an industry that generates \$5.41 billion in GDP and employs 89,200 Albertans.

The full report can be found online at <http://www.assembly.ab.ca/>

In it, the Committee sets out 13 recommendations; some are leaner, while others are meatier.

One recommendation in particular can immediately be realized: including an agriculture curriculum in the classroom. Want to see kids – and their parents -- come out of school with knowledge of sustainable food practices? Start a school garden, grow lettuce, prep a salad, and talk through the nutrition of the food they've proudly harvested. Arming Albertans in urban and suburban areas with a little more agricultural know-how would be a win for our province's farmers. Greater agricultural education aims to nip skepticism in the bud and foster a generation of people who appreciate and support locally-grown food.

Stakeholders who submitted ideas to the Committee will be pleased to see that many recommendations directly mirror their suggestions, and in some cases, even exceed them. For example, the beef industry was surprised to find that the Committee recommended developing a government-led Alberta beef label speaking to the high-quality product that commanded approximately \$1.7 billion in export sales in 2015. Rich Smith, executive director of Alberta Beef Producers, one of the many farm association groups who submitted their input to the Committee. Smith is curious about what the benefit of the label would be and is open to further discussions: "We have developed a definition of what Alberta beef is internally, but haven't seen a need to protect the label before publicly. We've seen success with Certified Angus Beef, related to specific genetics that can be verified, but to just label beef that is packaged in Alberta, well, I think we'd need to drill down the value in that. An industry-led and government supported approach would be ideal if we go forward with an Alberta beef certification."

Protecting Alberta beef under a label would give it a level of prestige and implied quality directly related to the region where it was produced. Think of the difference between Kraft parmesan cheese and Parmigiano-Reggiano cheese. The latter enjoys a protected label based on the region of Italy where it is produced, earning it international appeal.

Premier Notley and Minister of Trade Deron Bilous understand international appeal, having recently completed a trade mission to China and Japan. Touting our province in Asia may generate other opportunities to grow demand for Made-in-Alberta products, which accounted for approximately \$2.7 billion of Canada's exported sales to China and Japan in 2015.

Another recommendation focused on promoting Explore Local, a government-run initiative that assists producers and processors in selling their products directly through farmers' markets, restaurants, and agritourism. Explore Local caters to the niche markets where consumers are willing to spend a little extra to get what they perceive as a higher-quality product. Cheesemakers, brewers, specialty herb growers, and more enjoy greater market accessibility thanks to Explore Local.

Smith sees value in local market initiatives: "This report shows that there's truly room for local and international market opportunities for our products. Alberta beef is a testament to that, it's the ultimate local food."

Even as the Ministry of Environment and Parks is questioned on why livestock farming—and not just greenhouses—weren't exempt from the carbon tax, the agribusiness report references the carbon tax in its recommendation to promote use of programs for equipping farms in carbon-conscious ways.

Smith sees the carbon tax as a market opportunity: "We support programs that encourage grassland to continue to be economically viable for beef farming... if it's not economically viable, the grasslands are at risk of being used for something else."

Once Alberta's agribusiness sector has fully digested the report, we'll discover whether its recommendations will satisfy stakeholders, or leave them hungry for more.

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Rich Smith, Executive Director  
of Alberta Beef Producers