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national farmers union
In Union Is Strength

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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**TODAY'S CATTLE NUMBER STATS REVEAL A PERILOUS THREAT,
BUT ALSO A PROMISING ALTERNATIVE COURSE**

PAISLEY, Ont.—Twice a year, Statistics Canada releases data on the number of cattle in Canada. Today, it released data on the number of cattle as of July 1. Compared to a year ago or two years ago, those numbers are way down.

The number of beef cows is a key indicator of the size of the Canadian herd and the volume of future beef production. Statistics Canada says that Canadian beef cow numbers are down 5.6% compared to a year ago, and down 10.1% compared to two years ago.

Further, numbers are down even more in some provinces. Prince Edward Island has lost nearly a third of its beef cows over the past two years—down 32.5%. Manitoba is down by more than 10% compared to two years ago. And Alberta is down by nearly 14% compared to two years ago. The only place cow numbers did not decline was Quebec, with its more effective farm support programs and agriculture policies.

“Cattle prices have collapsed. On top of that, we have a drought in Alberta and ill-thought out approvals that have allowed the consolidation of the packing, feedlot, and auction mart sectors. Now our cattle herd is collapsing. There is a serious risk that a large number of the families who run Canada’s cow-calf operations will be pushed out of business. To a significant extent, that’s already happening. We have to stop it,” said NFU Alberta Board Member and cattle farmer Neil Peacock.

But the task is not as simple as stopping a decline in cattle *numbers*. Ontario cattle farmer and NFU Coordinator Grant Robertson draws an important distinction: “It’s not the number of animals we want to maximize; we want to maximize the number of family farms and ranches producing those animals and, especially, the profitability and viability of those operations. A generation ago, we had far fewer cattle, but farmers made a profit raising them. Today, with higher numbers, that profit is gone. Falling cattle numbers show that farmers have lost confidence in the future; they’re voting with their feet,” said Robertson.

Manitoba cattle farmer and NFU Coordinator Fred Tait concurred: “Canadian cattle producers have lost billions as we’ve increased production to pursue exports. Now, the market signal to farmers is that there is a need to downsize the herd. Partly as a result, the number of cattle is falling. According to Canada’s Beef Information Centre, we are now producing about 24% more beef than we can consume domestically. Given the massive losses in cattle—and in hogs—largely as a result of a failed and misguided export push, we should change course. We should pursue a path designed to maximize the number of farmers and ranchers, reduce production closer to a level that serves Canadian demand, and work to maximize profits for producers.”

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