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**national farmers union**

***In Union Is Strength***

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## **Letter To the Editor:**

### **Where's the Beef...Plan?**

The Canadian Cattlemen's Association (CCA) is very good at name-calling, but sadly lacking when it comes to laying out a coherent plan for increasing the money that farmers and ranchers are receiving for cattle sales.

The CCA affiliates in each province except Alberta collect a checkoff of \$2 per head for every animal sold. In Alberta, the CCA affiliate, Alberta Beef Producers (ABP), collects even more - \$3 dollars per head. Over the last twenty years, the price of cattle has fallen to half of what it used to be, but farmers are still forced to pay millions of dollars of checkoff taxes on cattle--with no choice in where their money goes. In fact, just since the BSE crisis first hit in 2003, ABP has collected more than \$70 million in a per-head tax from farmers/ranchers. So where is the 70 million dollar plan to raise the incomes of Canada's farmers and ranchers?

Did the CCA think that stopping the Government of Canada from opening up the books of the packers during the BSE crisis was a plan to help farmers and ranchers? All that did was make life easier for the packers and prevent the required information from getting back to farmers/ranchers and our decision makers.

In 2005, did the CCA oppose the take-over in Ontario of Better Beef by Cargill? No. In fact, the CCA stood on the sidelines and cheered as Cargill assumed monopoly control of beef packing in that province. Ontario now has the lowest priced cattle in Canada. Great for the packers—but not much of a plan for farmers/ranchers.

Is the CCA opposing the proposed sale of Tyson to XL – a corporate merger that will further kill competition by reducing the Big Three (Cargill, Tyson and XL) to the Big Two (Cargill and XL)? No.

The CCA's \$3 per head tax on cattle seems to be enriching packers much more than farmers/ranchers.

In the study called [The Farm Crisis and the Cattle Sector: Toward a New Analysis and New Solutions](http://www.nfu.ca) (available online at [www.nfu.ca](http://www.nfu.ca)), the National Farmers Union lays out a realistic plan to increase the returns to farmers and ranchers. The first step is to ban

packer ownership and control of cattle in feedlots – otherwise known as “captive supply”. Captive supply allows packers to manipulate cattle prices to their advantage. This is a problem not only in Canada, but also in the United States, and there are growing indications that US President Obama will tackle this issue sooner rather than later.

So, if you are tired of half-price cattle and want to increase returns to farmers and ranchers, read the NFU's cattle brief available at [www.nfu.ca](http://www.nfu.ca) . You don't have to agree with everything in the plan, but you won't find a more comprehensive analysis anywhere, and it is a starting point for positive change.

Let's start supporting our farmers and ranchers.

Yours truly,

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