

## ONTARIO BACKS FEEDER CO-OPS

The Ontario Ag Ministry will boost its limit as the guarantor for the Feeder Cattle Loan Guarantee Program to \$130 million, up from \$80 million. Eligible new farmers will be able to borrow up to \$50,000 for cattle purchases, while established farmers can get up to \$250,000. Members of one of the province's 19 feeder cattle co-ops are not required to make payments until cattle are sold, for a period of up to one year. Financing is available for up to 100 per cent of the purchase value.

## BABY BONUS FOR PIGS

China will give pig farmers 100 yuan (\$15.50) for every sow they breed to increase pork supply and cool inflation that is at a three-year high, the state council said. The government also plans to invest 2.5 billion yuan in pig farms and increase subsidies for veterinarians who fight epidemics. Pork, a staple food in China, has been a key driver of consumer inflation in recent months due to rising corn prices and a supply shortage after an epidemic hit pig farms last year. — Reuters



# LIVESTOCK

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## BIXS project beginning “soft launch” with 100 producers

**VALUE FOR INFORMATION** ▶ For the first time ever, producers will be able to track their calves as they move off the ranch and through the processing system

BY SHERI MONK  
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Cow-calf producers often complain that all their work in animal identification helps everyone else in the marketing chain, but not them. Designers say that is about to change.

The Beef InfoXchange System (BIXS), a project initiated by the Canadian Cattlemen's Association, is in the midst of the first phase of its launch with cow-calf producers after spending two years in research and development.

BIXS is not about traceability, and it is not mandatory. BIXS is not for government records and it is not for the public. It is an industry-led, voluntary system for producers, feeders and packers to keep track of their animals and their performance.

“BIXS is all about the flow of information and ensuring that intelligence up and down the marketplace is getting to where it belongs to improve efficiencies, profitability and decision confidence,” said Larry Thomas, national co-ordinator of the Canadian Beef Advantage and BIXS programs for the CCA.

Judy Madden of Dawson Creek, B.C. is one of the original trial users. “There was an awful lot of producer input into the makeup of the website. Larry and the developers asked for the input to begin with and absolutely everything that I suggested was taken to heart and worked in to it somewhere,” Madden said. I'm very, very pleased with how open they were to having producers actually having something to say with how this should be workable for producers.”

Producers can use the program and enter the bare minimum information of birth date or the calving start date along with the CCIA number, which saves them from entering the same information on the CCIA website.

“When we're up and running, BIXS will age verify your animals for you. In other words, it's a one-stop shop,” said Thomas.

However, the full potential of BIXS will be realized when ranch-



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JUDY MADDEN  
PRODUCER



### Analyzing feedlot performance

Though BIXS isn't ready to fold in the feeding and packing sectors yet, it's expected to be ready this fall. Once animals reach the feedlot stage of the value chain, it is hoped the information will continue to flow.

Feedlots, using the CCIA tag number of the cattle, will enter the date of entry, the estimated or actual weight of the cattle the day they arrive and an animal health score based on a standardized chart.

“Later on, within the feedlot you can do an analysis on a penned cohort basis on animal health score, but it also enables us to do some aggregate analysis back to vaccination programs and animal health because there's a direct relationship,” said Thomas.

This means a cow-calf producer from Saskatchewan can track the health and progress of a calf sold to a feedlot in Alberta.

If they notice consistently low health scores, they can change their vaccination or health protocol at the ranch. Alternatively, watching how calves perform at the feedlot can reinforce the producer's confidence in their current practices.

With the implementation of electronic grading, packers will be able to upload detailed carcass information into BIXS, revealing the yield percentage, carcass fat and even rib-eye measurements for each animal.

### User friendly

Despite the robust programming supporting the BIXS site, Madden says it's very intuitive now, easier to use than the CCIA site, and even users on dial-up will be able to use it easily.

Madden says she and others with high hopes for BIXS are somewhat worried gun-shy producers will assume the program is just another time-consuming



Larry Thomas, national co-ordinator of BIXS, worked closely with producers to ensure the website was easy to use for both high-speed, and dial-up Internet.  
PHOTO COURTESY OF LARRY THOMAS

endeavour with no payoff, but hopes ranchers will take the time to consider the potential rewards of this system.

“The cow-calf producers have been footing the bill time-wise and financially right from the time that these CCIA tags have come out. The cow-calf producers have to purchase the tags, the cow-calf producers have to see that the tags are put in the calves, the cow-calf producers have to make sure that the age verification is done and the records are kept. And there has been no financial return for any of that,” Madden said. “But for this to work, and I believe it can, it all stems from the primary producer stepping up to the plate and putting their information in first.”