Key Session Objectives

To gather and synthetize data and opinions from representatives of Canada and the US on the impacts of COVID-19 and responses to the challenges created for the livestock sector by the pandemic on the four sustainability domains defined by GASL, namely:

1. Food and nutrition security
2. Livelihoods and economic growth
3. Animal health and welfare
4. Climate and natural resource use
Session Presenters:

Mr. Paul Bleiberg, National Milk Producers Federation  
Dr. Liz Wagstrom, National Pork Producers Council  
Ms. Ashley McDonald, National Cattleman’s Beef Assn  
Ms. Fawn Jackson, Canadian Cattleman’s Assn.

Mr. Doug Glade, Dairy Farmers of America

Mr. Timothy Hardman, World Wildlife Federation  
Mr. Esben Larsen, World Resources Institute  
Mr. Alex Rincus, Health for Animals
Key Findings:

- Group overwhelmingly felt that effective communications among all stakeholders is key during a crisis.
- Strong relationships engender trust; make it easier to work through issues that come up during a pandemic.
- Importance of pre-existing risk management programs and worker safety protocols were cited by many companies as well.
- Even in the face of rising prices and income disruption, sales of most animal ag products actually increased during COVID. People ate at home more; sought out “comfort” foods.
- In the early days of COVID, human infections and shortages of protective equipment/PPEs for workers created added problems. Absenteeism and fear among workers was high. Being more well prepared in the future can help to alleviate worker-related issues.
Key Findings (cont.)

- Government and public/private support were key to weathering the storm.
  - Designating the food and agriculture sectors as critical infrastructure was important in allowing supply chains to continue; products to be shipped/delivered
  - Purchasing and buy-back programs made needed income available. Removed incentives to dump products
  - Livestock price insurance programs, increased lending capacity, emergency wage subsidies (cited by Canadian Beef Assn) helped mitigate issues
- In North America, where many animal sourced foods are eaten away from home, the supply chain shift from food service to retail was difficult. In countries where most meals are eaten at home, this shift was more seamless. The need to be more nimble in the future was discussed.
Key Findings (cont.)

- Beef industry cited a need for more small, regional packing facilities to mitigate supply chain risks during future crises. The need to move products long distances in a hurry became an issue that affected supply during the early stages of COVID.

- Sectors that were able to hold back animals and slow production (e.g., beef) were initially able to minimize issues with dumping/waste. In sectors where holdbacks were difficult (pork) more loss/euthanization occurred.
Key Findings (Cont.)

• NGO reps suggested COVID will increase food insecurity, exacerbate food production issues, and push more people into extreme poverty; certainly more so in some regions than others.

• There have been increased zoonotic exposures in recent years; need to foster healthy ecosystems to mitigate exposure and vulnerability in the future.

• Even in developed regions more structural flexibility is needed. Some fresh foods still unavailable despite govt buyback programs.

• WWF cited COVID crisis as an opportunity to look critically at current systems; create more sustainable solutions.
Thank you