The agri-food industry in Alberta is export oriented. In 2008, Alberta exports of primary and processed agricultural and food products (agri-food) reached a new record of $8.1 billion, an increase of 25.6 per cent over $6.5 billion in 2007. Also, Alberta was the third largest exporter of agri-food products in Canada, after Saskatchewan and Ontario.

Exports of primary commodities (animals and crops), worth $4.8 billion, played a significant role in Alberta’s strong export performance in 2008. Growth in these exports was driven mainly by the high prices of grains and oilseeds, particularly wheat and canola seed. On the other hand, exports of live cattle declined in both value and quantity, following two years of annual increases.

Value-added exports represented 41 per cent or $3.3 billion of Alberta’s total agri-food exports in 2008. Among the value-added products showing increases were beef, honey, refined sugar, tallow, refined canola oil, malt, wheat flour, oilseed cake and meal, beer, milled cereals and processed vegetables and fruits.

The top five Alberta agri-food exports in 2008 (ranked by value) were wheat ($2.1 billion), canola seed ($1.6 billion), beef ($1.1 billion), live cattle ($543 million) and pork ($342 million).

Of the total Alberta agri-food exports, 39 per cent were destined to the United States ($3.2 billion). Japan was the next largest export market ($1.2 billion), followed by China ($639 million) and Mexico ($618 million).

Alberta is the largest cattle-producing province in Canada. It led the nation in cattle and calf inventories, with an estimated 5.4 million head as of January 1, 2009, or nearly 41 per cent of the national total (13.2 million head).

Nearly two-thirds of Canadian beef processing occurs in Alberta. In 2008, cattle slaughter (excluding calves) in federally and provincially inspected plants was 2.3 million head or approximately 67 per cent of the Canadian total of 3.5 million. The Alberta slaughter also represented roughly 89 per cent of the western Canadian total of 2.6 million head.

Alberta beef production, consisting of carcass and boxed beef, was an estimated 756,147 tonnes in 2008. About 16 per cent of this beef was consumed in the province. The majority was shipped out of province, with 46 per cent going to other provinces in Canada, 31 per cent exported to the United States and 7 per cent to other countries.

There are 49,431 farms in Alberta (2006 Census). Total Alberta farmland area is 52.1 million acres, with an average farm size of 1,055 acres.

In 2008, Alberta accounted for 21.8 per cent of Canadian farm cash receipts generated from primary agriculture.

Alberta farm cash receipts totalled $10.0 billion in 2008, a new industry high. Record crop market receipts accounted for 46.2 per cent of the total, with livestock market receipts and direct program payments accounting for 42.5 per cent and 11.4 per cent, respectively.

Alberta’s total crop and livestock market receipts, in 2008, totalled $8.9 billion. Of this total, cattle and calves accounted for 33.5 per cent, canola accounted for 20.9 per cent and wheat (including durum) accounted for 20.0 per cent. The remainder was made up of 5.2 per cent for dairy, 4.5 per cent for hogs, 3.7 per cent for barley and 12.2 per cent for all other commodities.
In 2008, Alberta contributed 45.7 per cent ($3.0 billion) of total Canadian cattle and calf market receipts, and 12.5 per cent ($397.4 million) of hog receipts.

Alberta dairy producers generated $459.3 million, or 5.2 per cent, of Alberta farm market receipts in 2008. Market receipts from the province’s poultry and egg industry (including hatcheries) were $260.9 million, or 2.9 per cent of the Alberta total.

Alberta crop market receipts were $4.6 billion in 2008. Significant contributions to the national totals included sugar beets at 100 per cent, canola at 37.8 per cent, barley at 36.6 per cent, wheat (including durum) at 30.7 per cent, hay and clover at 29.5 per cent and dry peas at 19.4 per cent.

In 2008, total wheat production in Alberta (8.7 million tonnes) represented 31 per cent of the Canadian total, while barley (5.4 million tonnes) accounted for 46 per cent. Canola (4.3 million tonnes) and oats (541,300 tonnes) represented 34 per cent, and 13 per cent of the national total, respectively. During the past decade, Alberta produced 29 per cent of the nation’s wheat crop, 35 per cent of the canola, 44 per cent of the barley, and 19 per cent of the oats.

Food and beverage manufacturing sales grew 17.7 per cent in 2008 to total a new record of $11.7 billion.

In 2008, food and beverage manufacturing industries represented the third largest manufacturing sector in the province (16.7 per cent of total manufacturing sales). Petroleum and coal products manufacturing industries ranked first at 24.3 per cent followed by chemical manufacturing industries at 18.9 per cent.

Meat and poultry processing is at the heart of primary production and food processing activity in Alberta. Manufacturing sales totalled $5.6 billion in 2008 (51.5 per cent of total food processing).

In 2008, agri-food industries employed 85,500 Albertans, with 61,000 in primary agriculture and 24,500 in food and beverage manufacturing industries.

Alberta’s 2008 real Gross Domestic Product (GDP) for primary agriculture increased 6.3 per cent over 2007 to $4.7 billion.

Agri-food capital investment expenditures in Alberta for 2008 were an estimated $1.0 billion in primary agriculture and $146.5 million in food and beverage manufacturing. Agri-food expenditures accounted for 1.4 per cent of total investment in the province.

Producers spent an estimated $8.3 billion in farm operating expenses in 2008. Commercial feed was the largest single expense ($1.3 billion), followed by machinery fuel and repairs ($1.2 billion), and fertilizer and lime ($1.2 billion).

Total farm capital in Alberta was valued at $87.3 billion in 2008, consisting of $72.8 billion in land and buildings, $10.1 billion in machinery and equipment, and $4.4 billion in livestock and poultry.

In 2008, retail sales were up over 2007 for supermarkets, convenience and specialty food stores ($10.3 billion), beer, wine and liquor stores ($1.7 billion), and food services and drinking establishments ($6.6 billion).

Alberta households spent an average of $7,491 on food in 2007 (8.7 per cent of total household expenditures). The average spent on food purchased from stores fell 1.3 per cent while the average for food purchased from restaurants rose 5.6 per cent.

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July 2009