

## **The United Church Identifies Canada's Rural Crisis as a Critical Concern for Ottawa**

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Toronto: The United Church of Canada has called on the Canadian Government to do more to address what the church calls "the wider agricultural and rural crisis in Canada".

In a [letter](#) to the federal Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food, Lyle Vanclief, the church expresses continuing concern for [food](#) producers and [food](#) industry workers adversely affected by bovine spongiform encephalopathy (BSE) or "Mad Cow" disease. It also says that the BSE crisis must be addressed within the context of a much wider problem "that has been exacerbated in recent years by a number of factors including adverse weather conditions, low farm prices and trade-related difficulties."

"The agricultural crisis in Canada is not just a problem for farmers -- it's a problem for all us whether we live in urban or rural communities," says Mark Hathaway, [Food Security](#) Program Staff for The United Church of Canada.

While the church acknowledges the efforts that the government has made to reopen borders to exports of Canadian beef and livestock, it says more must be done to offset the negative impact of BSE on smaller producers whose predicament is particularly serious at this time.

The church suggests a number of ways to help producers who are most urgently in need, including the use of cash advances and other income supports. These measures should focus particularly on smaller, more vulnerable producers and include provisions for grants or debt cancellation to those most in need.

As well, the church urges the federal government to consider further measures to ensure that BSE-infected material cannot find its way into animal feed of any kind, for example by [banning](#) the use of meat and bone meal in all animal feed. Not only might such measures improve [food](#) safety, they could also pave the way to fully normalized exports.

Mark Hathaway says Ottawa must also improve measures to address farm income risks. He suggests initiating a process to improve the current Business Risk Management framework so that it can more adequately address farm income risks.

"The process must involve producers -- including small producers -- in the design and implementation of programs that are both affordable and flexible, and which include livestock production as well as crops," explains Hathaway. The letter also urges the Canadian Government to implement additional programs designed to cover situations of catastrophic losses outside of the Business Risk Management envelope.

"The agricultural crisis that is being borne on the family farm must be the responsibility of the whole human family," says Hathaway. "In the same way that we share the abundance when the harvest is good, we must also share the burden when factors beyond the control of the individual farmer threatens not only their livelihood but also puts at risk the well-being of all Canadians."

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