

Prairie beef co-op gets "sustainable" certification

By Staff

15 February 2009 - A ranchers' beef co-operative in Alberta and Saskatchewan has picked up certification from a U.S. group for meeting a long list of social and environmental standards for their product.

Food Alliance Certification Co-operative, based in Portland, Ore., has given Prairie Heritage Producers its certification for "sustainably-produced" beef. Prairie Heritage becomes the first company in Canada to meet Food Alliance standards, the U.S. group said Friday.

The group lists its standards as including "safe and fair working conditions; healthy and humane treatment of animals; reduction of pesticide use and toxicity; soil and water conservation, and; protection of wildlife habitat."

Food Alliance certification also disallows the use of hormone treatments or non-therapeutic antibiotics, or production of genetically modified crops or livestock.

"A lot of companies market 'natural' and 'green' products -- but when you look closely, there's not often much behind it," Food Alliance executive director Scott Exo said in the group's release.

Thus, he said, certification becomes an increasingly important tool to credibly back marketing claims. With third-party certification, he said, "there are independent standards and a regular inspection process to ensure the standards have been met. That level of transparency creates loyalty and trust."

Prairie Heritage Producers, which includes 17 member ranches across Alberta and Saskatchewan, was attracted to the "comprehensive nature" of Food Alliance's standards, said Christoph Weder, a Rycroft, Alta. rancher and one of the founders of the beef co-op.

"Our customers expect value -- but they also want a product that represents their values," said Weder, who's also a cattle columnist for [Grainews](#). "They are concerned about the environment, animal welfare, and how workers are treated."

Food Alliance certification provides the beef co-op with that level of "traceability, transparency and accountability," he said.

Beef produced by the co-operative is sold by retailers Thrifty Foods, Quality Foods and Rowe Farms in Alberta and B.C., and by Whole Foods Market in Vancouver. Canadian Mountain Holiday Lodges and the Toronto restaurant chain Hero Burgers also use the co-op's beef.