



Jim Laws
Executive Director
Canadian Meat Council

Jim Laws, the new executive director of the Canadian Meat Council (CMC), says he had a few concerned phone calls from friends questioning his sanity when they heard of his career change. To take over the reins of the CMC in the most turbulent time in the organization's history is not a mission for the faint of heart.

Laws knew he was leaving the relative calm of the Canadian Farm Business Council for the maelstrom of the BSE situation in Canada, but it was after he accepted the position that authorities discovered the second case of BSE in North America. Laws says "it's good to know that you're working on a serious problem and a serious issue and that's important." He adds though, "the learning curve is pretty steep, although I spent most of my career in the dairy sector and there's a lot of similarities."

Laws' first impression of the CMC was one of surprise that only five office staff represent an \$11 billion industry. As well, he was very impressed with the quality of people on the board of directors. "These guys are pretty knowledgeable and all very pleasant to work with so that was pretty impressive," he says.

One of Laws' goals is to increase the visibility of the CMC. In fact, on the day of our interview he had just wound up a television segment for a local Ottawa station. "I believe the CMC hasn't done a lot of [interviews] in the past, but now we simply have to speak up. Even being pretty green, I thought I'd better speak up and try to get some messages out, better than not [getting them out]. We employ a lot of people, and it's a very important part of the Canadian food economy."

Another one of his goals is to attract a few more new members and take a good hard look at Canada's meat inspec-

MEAT THE NEW GUY

tion system. "We have plants that are federally inspected, some plants that are provincially inspected and I believe some that are even municipally inspected. It just strikes me, and perhaps I'm still a bit naïve, as to why we have all these different types and why we don't just have one federally inspected meat standard."

The fluently bilingual Laws was born in Flint, Mich., but was raised in Ottawa and figures he's made a good choice for a career change. "I'm 45 years old now, so I'm not a young guy, but I'm not an old guy at the end of my career, so that's a pretty good time to take over the CMC." Among the skill sets he brings to the table is the ability to get the job done, without upsetting too many people, but with the backbone to be able to make tough decisions when necessary.

Laws graduated in 1981 with a B.Sc in agriculture from the University of Guelph, he's also a P.Ag., a member of the Ontario Institute of Agrology and a member of the Agriculture Institute of Canada.

After school he worked for the Northern Alberta Dairy Pool from 1982 to 1986 as quality control and then as field services manager. He then worked in Jamaica for two years helping to run a dairy operation and three small cheddar cheese making plants near Mandeville for CUSO.

Returning to Ottawa in the early '90s he worked with Agriculture Canada for a couple of term positions on international trade policy. He then became a permanent staff member and worked as chief of dairy processing and marketing until 1994. After that he went to Dairyworld Foods as director of member services until 1999. From there he was recruited as the executive director of the Canadian Farm Business Council and ran that organization for four and a half years.

When he's not at the office, Laws tries to swim at least a couple of times a week at Carleton University, clocking in at least 1,000 metres at a stretch, and has a well stocked basement workshop where he crafts furniture. Although, he adds, his five-year-old daughter Sarah and wife Anne keep him on his toes during the weekends.

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