POLICY

Beyond the rodeo: Why the Calgary Stampede matters for APG

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For most Albertans, the Calgary Stampede is about rodeo action, pancake breakfasts, and celebrating our western heritage. For Alberta Pulse Growers (APG), however, Stampede is also one of the most important advocacy opportunities of the entire year.

While thousands of people gather to enjoy the festivities, another kind of work is taking place behind the scenes. Politicians, senior government officials, industry leaders, business organizations, and stakeholders from across the country converge on Calgary for nine days of networking, conversations, and relationship building. In government relations circles, Stampede is widely recognized as one of the most important opportunities of the year to connect with decision-makers in a setting that is far more accessible and informal than the traditional halls of government.

Nevin Rosaasen, Sustainability and Government Relations Manager, and I were on the ground throughout Stampede this year representing Alberta Pulse Growers as its government relations team.

Over nine days, we attended more than 20 government relations and stakeholder engagement events. Many of these events were invitation-only and depended on the relationships APG has spent years building with elected officials, government staff, industry associations, and public policy leaders. The results were significant.

TOP TO BOTTOM: APG's Jacqueline Medalye with Hon. Heath MacDonald, Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada.
Hon. Nolan Dyck, Parliamentary Secretary of Indigenous and Rural Policing; Hon. Tara Sawyer, Minister of Agriculture and Irrigation; and APG's Nevin Rosaasen.
APG's Jacqueline Medalye with Hon. Devin Dreeshen, Minister of Transportation and Economic Corridors.
APG's Jacqueline Medalye and Nevin Rosaasen with NDP Leader Naheed Nenshi, Opposition Leader.

As government relations professionals often say, Stampede is about touchpoints. It is about strengthening relationships, making introductions, reconnecting with decision-makers, and ensuring that when important issues emerge, **our organization is already a trusted voice at the table.**

Over the course of the week, we met with nearly every provincial MLA active in the Stampede circuit, for a total of 43 MLA touchpoints. We met with Premier Danielle Smith and Opposition Leader Naheed Nenshi. We met with nearly 20% of Alberta-based federal MPs as well. We also met with Alberta Senators and key ministry staff responsible for files that directly impact pulse producers.

To an outside observer, that may sound like a busy social calendar. In reality, it is strategic advocacy. The greatest value of Stampede is not found in formal presentations or scheduled boardroom meetings. As government relations professionals often say, Stampede is about touchpoints. It is about strengthening relationships, making introductions, reconnecting with decision-makers, and ensuring that when important issues emerge, our organization is already a trusted voice at the table.

For pulse growers, this matters more than ever.

Governments are making decisions on issues such as agricultural competitiveness, sustainability initiatives, market diversification, trade development, transportation infrastructure, environmental policy, research investments and election priorities. Those decisions do not happen in isolation. The organizations that are consistently present, engaged, and constructive in their relationships with government are often the organizations that are consulted when policy is being developed. That is where APG's work at Stampede delivers value to members.

Every conversation helps ensure that decision-makers understand the contribution pulse growers make to Alberta's economy, rural communities, export markets, and environmental stewardship. Every relationship built today creates an opportunity to influence discussions tomorrow.

One of the highlights of this year's engagement efforts was APG Director Joe Rowbottom joining federal Agriculture and Agri-Food Minister Heath MacDonald for a farm tour and roundtable discussion with Team Alberta Crops. Opportunities like these allow producer organizations to share firsthand perspectives directly with federal decision-makers and ensure the voice of Alberta agriculture is heard at the highest levels.

Just as importantly, Stampede provides something that is increasingly rare in modern politics: Time.

A brief conversation over coffee or at a pancake breakfast often creates a stronger connection than a formal meeting scheduled months in advance. Ministers, MLAs, MPs, political staff, and stakeholders are all gathered in one place, allowing discussions to happen naturally and organically. Those informal conversations frequently become future meetings, policy consultations, or collaborative opportunities.

For APG, Stampede is also the unofficial starting line for next year's advocacy. Many people assume government activity slows down during the summer months. The reality is quite different. While legislatures may not be sitting, ministers continue travelling, political staff continue developing priorities, and governments begin preparing for the legislative and policy agendas that will emerge in the next session. Summer is often when priorities are shaped and relationships are strengthened behind the scenes.

The conversations APG has during Stampede frequently become the foundation for follow-up meetings throughout the summer. That is precisely why APG invests time and resources into being present at Stampede. Effective advocacy is not about showing up only when an issue becomes urgent. It is about building credibility before decisions are made. It is about ensuring government understands the needs of pulse growers before policies are drafted. It is about creating relationships that enable APG to advance member priorities.

The Calgary Stampede is where relationships are built, doors are opened, and future opportunities are created. When the tents come down and the crowds go home, the real value remains. The connections made, conversations started, and trust built during those nine days will continue to support APG's advocacy efforts for months to come.

For Alberta pulse farmers, that means a stronger voice, stronger relationships, and a stronger position at the decision-making table for our members.