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2003

## Review of *Kill and Chill: Restructuring Canada's Beef Commodity Chain* by Ian MacLachlan

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Broadway, Michael J., "Review of *Kill and Chill: Restructuring Canada's Beef Commodity Chain* by Ian MacLachlan" (2003). *Great Plains Research: A Journal of Natural and Social Sciences*. 675.  
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**Kill and Chill: Restructuring Canada's Beef Commodity Chain.** Ian MacLachlan. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2001. xiv+378 pp. Bibliography, index. \$70.00 cloth, \$27.95 paper.

Most North Americans are meat eaters but few care to ask where their meat comes from or how it is produced. *Kill and Chill* answers those questions from a Canadian perspective by chronicling the development of Canada's beef industry during the twentieth century.

Canadian beef processing shares many similarities with its US counterpart. At the beginning of the 1900s cattle were raised on the Plains and Prairies and shipped eastwards in railcars to be sold in stockyards, then slaughtered in multi-species packinghouses. Chicago became the prototypical meatpacking town with its sprawling stockyards and packinghouse district, a pattern later emulated in Toronto. Packinghouse working conditions described in Upton Sinclair's 1906 *The Jungle* led US and Canadian authorities to introduce federal meat inspection, while US unions fought to improve workers' pay and conditions on both sides of the border. By the 1970s, meatpacking wages exceeded national averages for manufacturing employees in both countries. Since then cost-cutting innovations—pioneered, in many cases, by US beef processors—have led to a restructuring. Old urban plants have closed, large-slaughter-capacity, single-species plants have opened in small towns on the Plains and Prairies, and industry wages have fallen.

*Kill and Chill* describes these developments in a well-written, logically organized, and thoroughly researched manner. It begins with an expla-

nation of calf production and ends at the supermarket meat department. Readers needing additional information will find an excellent references section. Each chapter opens with a short vignette in which the author (in most instances) describes his own “meat experiences,” such as watching cattle cars en route from Alberta to Montreal’s stockyards and visits to the family butcher shop. These accounts provide a foil for today’s reality—cattle shipments from the Prairies have discontinued, while most small butcher shops have disappeared and meat is now sold in pre-cut portions.

The first part of the book describes cow-calf production, cattle feeding, and marketing of finished slaughter cattle. Chapter 1 outlines the geography of cattle production and the fundamentals of calf production, “producing the greatest number of weaned calves with the heaviest weaning weights at the lowest cost.” Chapter 2 deals with the economics of cattle feeding and the emergence of Alberta as Canada’s feedlot capital. Cattle marketing is the focus of chapter 3, which provides case studies of the Ontario and Lethbridge stockyards. Several controversial issues in beef production are mentioned, including the use of hormones in feedlot cattle and the environmental impact of feedlots, but little indication is given to the extent of opposition to these developments.

Most of the book is devoted to beef processing: its origins (chapter 4); techniques (chapter 5); history (chapter 6); working conditions (chapter 7); and recent structural changes (chapter 8). Company histories are provided, key technological innovations are explained, the rise and fall of collective bargaining in beef processing is documented, along with recent investments by US companies. The last section (chapter 9) concludes with an informative analysis of the history of marketing beef.

In sum, *Kill and Chill* provides a comprehensive account of Canada’s beef industry and will undoubtedly become the standard reference for this topic. It is highly recommended for those wondering where their last steak came from. **Michael J. Broadway**, *Department of Geography, Northern Michigan University*.