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NCBA CEO Talks With Cattle Feeders About Winning Capitol Hill Debates

Working to change the direction of federal government policy on issues such as environmental regulation and mandatory Country-of-Origin Labeling (COOL) was the primary topic for National Cattlemen's Beef Association (NCBA) CEO Forrest Roberts when he spoke at the 2009 TCFA Annual Convention in Amarillo.

Roberts described the Obama Administration as "driven" when it comes to its environmental agenda. He indicated that getting Administration officials to deal with legitimate information might be critical to forestalling regulation that would harm beef producers.

For example, Roberts noted that the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) estimates that greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions from all livestock operations in the country account for less than 1% of all GHG emissions. Beef production's share of the emissions total would be even smaller - around .12%, according to Roberts. He pointed out that EPA's data presents "a far different picture" than "what you see when you read the report from the UN - 'Livestock's Long Shadow' - which reported that that estimate should be closer to 18%." The difference in those numbers, said Roberts, "starts to set the stage" for the efforts by organizations like NCBA and TCFA to work with the Administration.

Roberts told the cattle feeders that the EPA emissions data shows that the Administration's plans to require reporting of GHG emissions from manure management systems "will not provide any data that's useful in addressing what EPA's trying to do in terms of their long term goal of addressing greenhouse gas emissions. Rather, what it will do is put a significant financial and administrative burden on you as cattle producers and feedyard operators in this country."

Recent action by Congress has actually given the livestock industry a win on the issue of emissions reporting, Roberts said. NCBA, TCFA and their allies on Capitol Hill helped persuade Congress to include two important amendments when it passed the Fiscal Year 2010 Department of Interior/EPA Appropriations. One amendment deletes EPA funding for the implementation of any rule requiring mandatory reporting of GHG emissions from manure management systems. The other amendment prevents EPA

from implementing regulation of GHG emissions under Title V of the Clean Air Act, a concept that has become known as "the cow tax." The amendments will remain in effect for one year.

NCBA, TCFA and other agriculture groups continue efforts "to position agriculture as part of the solution to climate change by providing important sources of offsets such as soil carbon sequestration as well as renewable energy," Roberts said.

Meanwhile information is also a vital tool for NCBA's continuing battle over COOL, according to Roberts. He called on beef producers to "please continue to feed us information and data" about the hardships COOL is causing their operations so that NCBA can demonstrate to USDA "the true economic impact" of the law. Roberts said NCBA is pushing USDA to rescind a decision to de-fund a study of COOL's effects on the industry.

During his presentation, Roberts also outlined ongoing efforts within NCBA to make the organization more efficient and to better focus on real priorities as the industry's challenges evolve. "There is a culture shift within our organization. Within NCBA, that is a culture of disciplined action, accountability, absolutely with a sense of urgency." NCBA recently enacted budget and personnel cuts, and more changes to the organization's structure will be presented to NCBA members Cattle Industry Convention in January in San Antonio.

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