

Full length version of articles abbreviated in TCFA Newsletter print edition.

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NCBA Stakes Out Positions

During last week's NCBA Cattle Industry Convention in Reno, NCBA producer-members discussed many issues important to the cattle and beef industries, including:

Beef Checkoff Program: Cattlemen directed NCBA to ask Congress to approve a process that will allow producers to vote on enhancements to the Beef Checkoff Program. NCBA policy doesn't ask for a specific increase in the Checkoff rate but requests that Congress ensure that the program is adequately funded.

Renewable Fuels: NCBA continues to favor allowing the 54-cent tariff on imported ethanol and the 51-cent per gallon fuel blending tax credit to expire in early 2009 and late 2010, respectively, as is currently scheduled.

Animal Identification: NCBA still supports a voluntary, market-based approach to animal identification. Current policy was updated to recognize the benefits premises registration numbers can provide in meeting animal health emergency requirements - as long as they do not impede normal cattle movement.

Food Safety: NCBA members reaffirmed existing policy to work with all segments of the beef industry, as well as government officials, to reduce the prevalence of *E. coli* O157:H7.

Nutrition and Health: NCBA reaffirmed its statement of principles to provide factual information to consumers, continued research on beef's nutritional qualities and a science-based approach to portion sizes, diet and exercise.

Animal Health: Cattlemen adopted policy to support several educational and financial aid programs to help address the nation's growing shortage of large animal veterinarians.

All policies adopted during the membership meeting are subject to approval by more than 30,000 NCBA members nationwide. Convention results become official when the mail-in ballot process concludes in March.

The Beef Checkoff Program continues to be viewed favorably by a large majority of beef and dairy producers across the country, according to a recent study by Aspen Media & Market Research of Boulder, Colo. Aspen conducted random phone interviews with 1,225 producers nationwide in late December and early January. The survey showed 7 in 10 producers approve of the program, a level of support consistent with similar studies that have shown approval rates ranging between 68% and 73% over the past five years. The CBB says the study also showed that the more producers know about the Checkoff, the more likely they are to approve of the program. The survey found 87% of respondents had heard of the program, while 68% considered themselves somewhat or very well informed about the Checkoff.

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USDA Says A Promising FMD Vaccine has been developed through joint research between Agricultural Research Service, the Department of Homeland Security and GenVec, a Maryland-based biopharmaceutical company. The first molecular-based FMD vaccine for cattle is made without infectious FMD, which means it can be safely made in conventional facilities, according to USDA. The vaccine has been adapted to protect against two of the seven serotypes, or closely related forms, of the virus. But the vaccine's effectiveness against other serotypes remains to be determined. Although more testing is needed, early results show cattle to be protected within seven days of vaccination and to maintain protection for at least 21 days. USDA believes the vaccine will eventually prove to provide protection for at least six months, which is the range achieved with current vaccines.

Human Grading Of Beef Carcasses could be replaced by video analysis instruments that are undergoing testing in four processing facilities in Kansas and Nebraska, a USDA official tells *Meatingplace.com*. The instruments, which grade carcasses by analyzing a digital video image of the ribeye portion, are intended to make grading more uniform, precise and accurate across the country than has been proven possible with human graders' subjective evaluations, the official said.

A Lawsuit Alleging That Tyson Foods arranged to hire illegal immigrants in order to hold down wages at its poultry plants has been tossed out by a federal judge in Chattanooga, Tenn. The judge ruled that the four employees who filed the suit failed to show that Tyson was "harboring or concealing illegal aliens" at any of seven plants named in the suit. However, *Meatingplace.com* reports the judge's ruling said evidence related to an eighth plant in Indiana was sufficient to take to a jury, but had nothing to do with the plaintiff's specific claims. The plaintiffs have not indicated whether they plan to appeal.

PETA Is Applauding Safeway for the super-market giant's announcement of new animal welfare policies. Safeway says it will increase the amount of pork it buys from suppliers that don't use gestation crates by 5% over each of the next three years and will give purchasing preference to suppliers that don't use gestation crates. Safeway will also increase purchases from and give preference to producers of cage-free eggs and to poultry processors that use controlled-atmosphere killing, which animal rights proponents consider the least cruel method of harvesting chickens and turkeys. According to *centredaily.com*, the action by Safeway follows PETA's submission of a shareholder resolution – now withdrawn – and separate discussions with HSUS.

Also On the Animal Rights Front, HSUS suffered a setback in Nebraska when a state senator withdrew a bill that would have phased out the use of gestation crates for pregnant sows. State Senator DiAnna Schimek, who pulled the bill after it came under an attack led by the Legislature's Ag Committee Chairman, told the *Midlands News Service* that she had been approached about introducing the bill less than an hour before the bill introduction deadline. "I'm not saying I agree or disagree (with the bill's intent)," said Schimek. "I'm saying I didn't give it a thought, and that's a terrible way to introduce legislation in the first place." An HSUS spokesman said it's uncertain whether the organization will make another attempt at raising the issue in Nebraska.