

BEEF BUSINESS

by Julie Mais, editor

In this month's "Beef Business," we present remarks from the U.S. Secretary of Ag, infrastructure policy updates and how the industry is sharing facts on "fake meat."

Secretary of Ag addresses cattlemen

U.S. Secretary of Agriculture Sonny Perdue understands how important export markets are to U.S. agriculture, and he's made sure that President Donald Trump understands it, too.

Perdue offered that assurance in a media conference and during a speech delivered to cattlemen and women attending the recent 2019 Cattle Industry Convention in New Orleans, La.

The Secretary also commented on issues such as so-called "fake meat," the new federal farm bill, and the Electronic Logging Device (ELD) mandate, but devoted a majority of his time to what he called three priorities for agricultural producers, "trade, trade and trade."

Referring to trade talks with China, Perdue said he believes negotiations are re-entering a phase of cooperation. He cited a serious desire, on both sides, to arrive at a trade agreement. He added, however, that any agreement made on paper must be accompanied by a willingness to comply with its rules.

Perdue said trading partners must act like "good neighbors." Likening past behavior to that of a cattleman that purposely and repeatedly lets his stock get into a neighbor's pasture,

Perdue referred to China's forced transfer or theft of intellectual property as unneighborly.

"You've got to respect that what's yours is yours and what's mine is mine. You've got to respect the rules," Perdue said. "That's how trade is supposed to work."

Perdue also warned against the folly of becoming too dependent on any one customer, neglecting other markets. He noted ongoing efforts to open and expand trade in Southeast Asia, Europe and Japan by trying to remove tariff and non-tariff barriers to U.S. beef as well as other agricultural products.

Regarding the development and expected commercialization of cell-cultured meat, Perdue acknowledged tension between the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) and the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) concerning which agency should have oversight of production, packaging and labeling. He said both agencies are in the "food safety business" and need to get along, so jurisdiction will be shared.

"In the case of cell-cultured proteins, the FDA does have some expertise, and it's probably appropriate that it be involved. But when it comes to (cell) harvest, packaging and labeling, I want you to

know that the USDA is going to be there," Perdue stated.

Commenting on the new farm bill, Perdue credited cattle industry efforts in advocating for its National Animal Disease Preparedness Program and National Animal Vaccine Bank. This measure secures \$120 million in funding for programs including a foot-and-mouth disease (FMD) vaccine bank. Perdue said the bill includes "other good things," such as enhancements to the Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) and other conservation programs.

The legislation also maintains funding for USDA's Market Access Program and Foreign Market Development Program, which aid development of global markets for U.S. beef, pork and lamb.

"I know the ELD mandate has been a thorn in your flesh," Perdue said, referring to the federal ELD mandate and its limits on truckers' hours of service. While livestock hauler compliance has been delayed temporarily, Perdue said the rule needs to be amended for haulers of perishable cargo.

"The mandate doesn't make sense for cattle transporters and drivers hauling other perishable goods," Perdue allowed. "I do think Congress is starting to listen and may

come to understand the need for consideration of perishables.”

In closing, Perdue lamented how the government is hindered by political posturing, among both republicans and democrats, and how Congress often seems determined to keep the administration from succeeding with anything.

“We really shouldn’t let the good of the country suffer because we don’t want the other part to have a victory,” Perdue stated. “We ought to stop the silly politics and make decisions that are good [for] the people of this country.”

— Troy Smith, field editor

Infrastructure policy

Members of the Rebuild Rural Coalition shared insights about the likelihood of infrastructure policy changes at a workshop at the American Farm Bureau Federation’s 100th Annual Convention.

Robbie Boone, vice president of government affairs with Farm Credit Council, shared the reason behind the formation of the coalition in 2017: focusing on and bringing attention to the unique needs of rural America. The coalition, of which AFBF is a member, zeroes in on eight priorities for rural America – ag research, broadband, energy, financing, healthcare, transportation, housing and drinking water.

A recent social media campaign with a different focus each week “keeps the conversation going” about the need for infrastructure policy reform, Boone said. The coalition hosted a briefing in January for Senate and House leaders on more than a dozen committees that have jurisdiction over possible infrastructure proposals.

Mike Steenhoek, executive director of the Soy Transportation Coalition, highlighted a list of “10 most wanted” infrastructure projects. This includes dredging the lower Mississippi River

between Baton Rouge, La., and the Gulf of Mexico to a depth of 50 feet. Doing so will allow ships to carry heavier loads in addition to attracting large vessels. This enhancement to the supply chain would return \$461 million to U.S. soybean farmers.

Source: AFBF

Fake meat facts

The National Cattlemen’s Beef Association (NCBA) launched a new campaign on Feb. 6, highlighting critical questions about the production of lab-grown fake meat. The Fake Meat Facts campaign will shine a spotlight on the many unknowns that the federal government must clarify before finalizing the regulatory framework for these emerging products.

Last year, the USDA and FDA announced a framework for regulating lab-grown fake meat. The USDA will have primary oversight of food production and labeling, while the FDA will have oversight of cell collection and cell growth.

However, as NCBA noted at the time, many details still need to be worked out. Additional information about the production, composition, and safety of cell-cultured protein is needed to inform the development of a comprehensive framework that protects consumers.

Source: NCBA

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