

from the office

LEAD IN

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The U.S. beef industry may get a third chance to take more control of its future, through implementation of a new beef information and promotion checkoff program. It is an opportunity that we can't afford to let slip from our grasp.

The proposed legislation, introduced by the National Cattlemen's Assn. and passed in late June by a House Agriculture Subcommittee, should become part of the 1985 Farm Bill. When this happens, the cattle industry may petition the USDA to put the new program into effect.

The name of the new program would be the Beef Promotion and Research Act. The new bill includes several changes that should endear it to most everyone in the beef cattle industry.

First, the \$1 per head checkoff would be on all cattle sold, and there would be no provision for a refund. Thus, everyone in the industry would participate.

Second, it covers all imported beef, with the checkoff to be paid by the importer.

Third, control of the funds would rest more in the hands of the state beef promotion organizations with up to 50 cents of the \$1 per head checkoff remaining with the state organizations.

Fourth, a beef promotion operating committee would be responsible for developing budgets and contracting with existing national organizations to conduct programs of beef promotion and research. Ten members of this committee would be elected by a Cattlemen's Beef Promotion Board, with membership based upon state cattle population. The other 10 members of the operating committee would be elected by the Beef Industry Council.

In addition, the Cattlemen's Beef Promotion Board would administer the checkoff and collection program and approve the final budget.

Fifth, a referendum on the Promotion and Research Act would be held two years after the program begins. This would give cattle producers an opportunity to understand how it was organized and evaluate its administration before making any final decision.

The farm bill could be passed by late 1985, and the Beef Promotion and Research Act could be implemented within six months after passage of the legislation. This means the Act could be in effect by late spring of 1986.

Whether or not the USDA is petitioned to implement the Act will depend upon how well the idea is supported by cattle producers. The NCA for example, has no intention of forging ahead with the program unless it has widespread support within the industry. This means that it is important for all of us to inform ourselves and then to let our state and national beef organizations know how we feel.

There is one more reason why we need to get this Act approved as soon as possible. The National Pork Producers have also introduced similar legislation in the House of Representatives. There is every reason to believe that the pork producers will be solidly behind their program. They have a long tradition of supporting information and advertising programs.

If we fail to act positively, we could be left far behind in a retail meat industry that is changing faster than most of us realize. We have wasted too much time already and given up far too much ground to competing foods and food faddists.

AJ