

Policy Priorities and Initiatives Set for 2003

Cattle producers from across the country set priorities for the National Cattlemen's Beef Association (NCBA) during the 2003 Cattle Industry Convention and Trade Show.

Featuring high-ranking government officials from every major agency dealing with the cattle industry, two Cabinet secretaries and a television address from the president, this year's Convention demonstrated the Bush administration's commitment to NCBA priorities, according to Chandler Keys, NCBA vice president of government affairs. "We had an impressive turnout this year," Keys says. "To implement the policies agreed upon at this convention, we need support across the board. And without a doubt, this turnout shows everyone that we mean business."

During in-depth policy committee meetings, producers had a chance to discuss top political priorities for the year, listen to fellow producers and talk with policy officials and NCBA staff from the Washington, D.C., office.

After days of committee meetings, regional meetings and group forums, the members of the NCBA passed resolutions that address specific concerns.

Policy initiatives were passed, renewed and amended at the 2003 Convention, and they serve as a "road map" for NCBA staff, members and state affiliates. Following is a brief summary.

Disaster relief

Members voted to continue to aggressively pursue adequate funding for livestock producers adversely impacted by disaster conditions.

They also voted to continue to monitor the distribution of any disaster assistance funding to ensure the funds are directed to those producers directly impacted.

NCBA is committed to working with the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) and Congress to ensure that eligibility criteria for all

livestock assistance and compensation programs are based on livestock and/or forage production losses and that funding is distributed on actual county losses.

Live cattle marketing

The NCBA will work as a catalyst and information clearinghouse with producers, feeders, packers and retailers to formulate, implement and provide information on grid-pricing systems that adequately reward the management techniques required to consistently supply a high-quality product at every level of production.

The physical delivery process is vital in maintaining the integrity of the Chicago Mercantile Exchange (CME) Live Cattle contract, and contract specifications must be balanced so that neither shorts nor longs in the market have any undue advantage in the delivery process or related arbitrages. The board of directors supports (1) an increase in the allowable average weight of animals in a delivery unit to 1,350 pounds (lb.); (2) that Greeley, Colo., should be added as a delivery point; and (3) when the cumulative effects of contract modifications result in a level of deliverable supply sufficient to support an increase in the spot month speculative trading limits, without having a negative impact on basis predictability, an increase will be supported.

Biosecurity

Securing the health and safety of agriculture from terrorist groups and other negative influences is of serious concern. Therefore, the board of directors voted to

support new initiatives to (1) strengthen the penalties for anyone involved in terrorist activities affecting the agricultural industry; (2) provide increased coordination of local, state and federal officials to more effectively monitor and respond to these threats; and (3) give producers increased protections against false and derogatory statements or ballot issues that would endanger a producer's livelihood or diminish livestock production practices.

Cattle health and well-being

NCBA members are dedicated to keeping foreign animal diseases out of the country.

Two policies passed will help Washington, D.C., staff, the USDA and Congress work together to ensure that systems are in place to prevent the reintroduction of Texas cattle fever or the introduction of heartwater, spread by the tropical bont tick, to the United States.

Members encourage congressional awareness and support to be maintained to adequately fund John's disease control and research programs.

The population of free-roaming deer, elk, bison, feral hogs, et al, increases the potential of cattle exposure to disease and pests. It is significant due to cohabitation and private ownership of these animals, which has increased dramatically in recent years, and the risk of exposure to disease (both eradicated domestic and foreign animal disease) is high. Therefore, NCBA will encourage the USDA Agricultural Research Service (ARS), U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS), universities, and other researchers to

conduct needed disease surveillance and research on wildlife and exotic game animals to protect the cattle population.

Federal lands

NCBA shall seek a change to Bureau of Land Management (BLM) grazing regulations during the appeals process, working to ensure that no permittee will be deprived of the re-issuance of a grazing permit or lease because



▶ During the Stakeholders Congress, producer members voted on a resolution by standing.

PHOTOS BY STEPHANIE VELDMAN

the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) review was not completed prior to expiration or transfer of a permit or lease.

NEPA analysis should not be required for the renewal or transfer of grazing permits unless significant modification of the permit is occurring, nor for activities that implement the goals of a Resource Management Plan that has met existing NEPA requirements. NCBA will work to find a long-term strategy in order to complete the environmental review process in a timely, thorough and practical manner.

Government agencies are being strongly urged to use on-the-ground and site-specific monitoring techniques that utilize science-based practices and principles that establish long-term trend conditions. Members are actively opposed to the implementation of new nonscientific numeric standards, such as streambank trampling standards, which have not been accepted by the scientific community and do not measure trend and resource health.

Country-of-origin labeling

Serious concerns about mandatory country-of-origin labeling (COOL) have arisen since the passage of the 2002 Farm Bill, and there is increasing recognition of possible adverse aspects, including the costs and impacts, relative to tracking, auditing, verification and compliance.

With regard to implementation of mandatory COOL, the board of directors directed the NCBA to (1) request congressional hearings to investigate the impact; (2) request the USDA to hold field hearings to increase awareness about COOL; (3) develop educational and informational messages to inform producers about COOL; and (4) work with state cattle associations and related groups to communicate this message.

Farm Bill implementation

Policy was adopted to work to ensure that land tracts that include nonprogram crops in planting history for 1998-2001 are able to obtain a special exemption to retain the current Production Flexibility Contracts (PFC) base when a producer chooses to update acre and yield bases.

Property rights and environmental management

The board of directors opposes the implementation of the American Heritage Rivers Initiative, and the NCBA has resolved to contact each congressional office and to encourage members to oppose American Heritage River designations for rivers in their districts.

The Endangered Species Act causes undue economic loss through restriction of private



►Gale Norton, U.S. Secretary of the Department of Interior, spoke at the Stakeholders Congress, Feb. 1. During her address, Norton said that through her public service she hopes to help America build a healthier environment and a more secure economy. To achieve this she said, "We need to initiate what I call a 'new environmentalism,' and each citizen must take responsibility and become a steward of the land."

property rights, restraint of recognized management practices and of predator damage. NCBA is urging the FWS to immediately promulgate procedures and regulations whereby information or references to occurrences of plant or animal species on private property without the written consent of the landowner or his agent be excluded from consideration by the FWS in connection with listings or determinations of threatened or endangered species.

The board of directors voted to oppose federal laws and policies that impose conservation easements on landowners or that utilize conservation easements in a way that causes economic harm to rural communities.

NCBA opposes including public access to private property as a condition of, or in the prioritization for, receiving federal cost share funds for conservation.

Tax and credit

NCBA's top tax and credit priority in 2003 continues to be the fight for permanent repeal of the Death Tax, and the members renewed these resolutions.

Conservation easements are a valuable tool for estate planning and allow tax benefits to the donor of the easement. Legislation to give the donor of a conservation easement substantially more time to use the tax deduction than the current six years and to give agricultural producers a larger percentage income tax deduction than currently allowed (30%) by the tax code is supported.

Beef safety

Reduction of *E. coli* O157:H7 continues to be a top priority for the beef industry, and NCBA reaffirms its commitment to further reduce the risks associated with *E. coli* O157:H7, utilizing scientifically proven production practices and technologies, and its goal to produce, deliver and serve wholesome and safe beef for each and every family.

NCBA will continue working with all segments of the beef industry and government to pursue interventions that reduce the prevalence of *E. coli* O157:H7 and to seek the necessary regulatory approvals and implementation across the industry.

NCBA will work with members of the beef industry and the USDA to fund the dissemination of food safety educational resource materials to consumers of beef products.

International trade

The board of directors voted that high priority be given to funding foreign marketing initiatives through the U.S. Meat Export Federation (USMEF), including redeveloping growth in markets with losses, such as Japan and other countries.

Proposed removal of import quotas on Australian beef under a bilateral trade agreement could adversely affect U.S. cattle producers without adequate negotiated protections. Therefore, any bilateral trade agreement between the United States and Australia that takes effect before the World Trade Organization (WTO) Doha Round Agreement becomes effective will be opposed.

"NCBA members bring an overwhelmingly impressive list of policy issues into the spotlight," says Eric Davis, an Idaho beef producer and the newly elected NCBA president. "We don't just work on one issue, but represent the entire cattle industry's needs in Washington, D.C. Our thousands of members and staff are at the cutting edge of each of these sectors, and this should prove to be an exciting year for our industry?"

For more information on new and amended policies passed by the NCBA board of directors, log on to <http://hill.beef.org>. For complete copies of any or all of the policies, directives and recommendations passed at the NCBA Annual Convention, please contact NCBA at (303) 694-0305.



Editor's Note: This news release was provided by the National Cattlemen's Beef Association. For more convention coverage, see page 344.

