

Senate Passes MPR Bill

R-CALF says concerns remain about mandatory price reporting.

In September, the U.S. Senate passed a Livestock Mandatory Price Reporting bill identical to the one approved last year by the U.S. House of Representatives, which extends mandatory price reporting to 2010. In announcing the bill's Senate passage, Ranchers-Cattlemen Action Legal Fund United Stockgrowers of America (R-CALF USA) said the group was pleased with the progress to keep cattle producers competitive and ensure transparency in the marketplace.

In December 2005, the Government Accountability Office (GAO) issued a 52-page report that identified key areas in need of improvement in the existing law to make livestock markets both more transparent and accurate so that independent cattle producers would be able to compete with meatpackers on a level playing field.

Sen. Tom Harkin (D-Iowa) and Sen. Chuck Grassley (R-Iowa) commissioned the GAO study, and both said they would continue to push for additional improvements in the next Congress.

The Livestock Mandatory Price Reporting Act (MPR) requires packers, processors and importers to provide critical price, contracting, and supply and demand information to the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA), which uses the information to create price reports for livestock producers. Since the legislation authorizing the Livestock Mandatory Price Reporting program expired last September, the program has been operating on a voluntary basis.

"R-CALF is appreciative of the Iowa congressional delegation's efforts in this matter," said Randy Stevenson, R-CALF USA Region II director. Stevenson also chairs R-CALF's Marketing Committee. "Getting the mandatory price reporting law back on the books is a better scenario than relying on packers to voluntarily furnish this essential information. Our eventual goal is to get complete and transparent reporting that's equivalent to what is required on Wall Street.

"R-CALF looks forward to working with Senators Harkin, Grassley and Chambliss

to make certain the U.S. Department of Agriculture begins to implement the

GAO recommendations, and in the meantime, to determine whether there are administrative steps the agency can take to improve these price reports," Stevenson said.

"We spent a great deal of time in meetings and discussions trying to reach a consensus to move a Senate MPR bill that addressed the GAO recommendations," said Jess Peterson, R-CALF

director of government relations, noting opposition from other industry groups to address these changes legislatively.

Harkin and Grassley secured a commitment from Senate Agriculture Committee Chairman Saxby Chambliss that this issue would be brought up in the upcoming 110th Session of Congress, notably in Farm Bill discussions and a Senate Agriculture Committee hearing.

"Although this is not the exact outcome we wanted, MPR was not weakened, and there is an opportunity to build on this bill," Peterson said. "It will be extremely important for cattle producers to remain engaged in this issue as R-CALF USA will push hard to implement an improved MPR during the 110th Session of Congress."

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Editor's Note: This article was provided by R-CALF USA.

