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Livestock

Sheep industry fears loss of herder H-2A visa provisions

By CAROL RYAN DUMAS
Capital Press

The American Sheep Industry Association and sheep producers are urging the U.S. Department of Labor to maintain special labor provisions for open-range livestock herders in a proposed rule due out by April 15.

The provisions are included in the "special procedures" sub rules of the H-2A visa program that allow U.S. farmers and ranchers to hire temporary or seasonal foreign workers when they are unable to recruit enough U.S. workers.

Loss of those provisions would be disastrous for open-range operations and would unravel a program that has worked well for decades, said Peter Orwick, ASI executive director.

Since the 1950s, the special procedures have allowed monthly wage rates for livestock herders and allows for



Courtesy of Stephen Ausmus/USDA ARS

A sheep herder moves sheep to research sites at the U.S. Sheep Experiment Station near Dubois, Idaho.

herders to live in wagons, trailers and other mobile housing because they are on open range.

The U.S. sheep industry has

almost exclusively relied on foreign labor since the 1950s, and the special procedures are critical to the H-2A shepherder program, Orwick said.

The industry fears DOL's proposed rule is cause for concern, he said.

More than 40 percent of U.S. sheep graze on federal and state lands in remote areas, and workers must be with the sheep at all times to move them and protect them from predators, Orwick said.

Without the mobile housing and monthly wage provisions, those operations couldn't afford the labor, he said.

"If we don't have mobile housing, the herder program won't work no matter what else" is in the provisions, he said.

It would take most of a day for workers to drive to and from remote areas from permanent housing, and operators couldn't hire enough workers to be near the animals at all times, he said.

The special procedures have always been informal guidelines and have never gone through the rule-making

process, said Kelli Griffith, executive director of Mountain Plains Agriculture Service.

The special provisions are essential for livestock businesses operating on open range. The concern is that DOL will remove one or all of the critical provisions, which would eliminate a labor supply for open-range operations, she said.

That would put businesses in jeopardy, she added.

The threat to the herder provisions originated when four former herders sued DOL in 2011 in federal district court, alleging the agency violated the Administrative Procedure Act.

The herders challenged DOL's 2011 adoption of two documents announcing special procedures governing certification of H-2A herder positions without rule-making, according to court documents.

The plaintiffs also contend-

ed the documents set wages and working conditions below levels required by the Immigration and Nationality Act, reduce their access to herding job opportunities at required wages and working conditions and depress wages and working conditions of similarly employed U.S. workers, according to court documents.

The court dismissed the case in February of 2013 for lack of standing. The plaintiffs appealed, and the appeals court reversed the dismissal and directed DOL to put the herding special procedures through the rule-making process, Griffith said.

Mountain Plains Ag Service and Western Range Association, which act as agents to secure foreign herders for their member producers, intervened in the case.

After a court-granted extension, DOL has until April 15 to issue a proposed rule, Griffith said.

Water quality considerations in livestock management

By DOUG WARNOCK
For the Capital Press

Greener Pastures
Doug Warnock



Many ranches in the Northwest have access or proximity to surface water and livestock can cause water quality problems. Preventing stream pollution is much more effective than having to deal with it after it has taken place.

Livestock Management and Water Quality, a Washington State University publication, EB2021, provides excellent information and tips on good management for livestock producers. This publication was written by Tipton Hudson, WSU Regional Range and Livestock Extension specialist. Here are highlights from the publication.

Water contaminants associated with livestock are bacteria, sediment, nutrients and warmer temperatures. All of these occur naturally in the environment, but are problems when they occur at unnatural levels. So, the degree or level of their occurrence creates the problem.

Clean water should have low levels of bacteria, no harmful amounts of chemicals and a temperature range that supports aquatic life. Each stream has a particular natural range in sediment content depending on its specific geological factors, vegetation, slope and source of water. Sediment in excess of the natural range is considered pollution.

Responsible livestock managers will employ practices that help to improve and support high water quality in adjacent streams. Practices should minimize direct deposit of manure in the water, reduce overland movement of bacteria-laden water and enhance water infiltration into the soil at the point of contact.

Tools and practices that can be used to achieve high water quality are: water tanks, water gaps, riparian fencing, forest buffers, supplemental feeds, herding and planned grazing. Properly placed water tanks help to reduce the time that animals spend drinking and loafing in streams. Tanks can also be effective to improve livestock distribution on

upland areas, resulting in more even utilization of the forage.

Water gaps are designed to make animals uncomfortable so that they access the stream only long enough to drink and then leave. The water gaps have steep slopes for access and are lined with large, rough cobble, which discourages any loafing.

Fencing is an effective way to increase the control of both location and time of access for animals in riparian areas. Controlled access can be beneficial in harvesting forage and stimulating vegetative growth. Smaller pasture divisions lend themselves to better control and reduced time in sensitive areas.

Buffer strips with larger, woody vegetation help to stabilize streambanks and promote good moisture infiltration into the soil.

Feeding supplements to livestock attracts the animals away from sensitive areas and toward more remote, steep areas, which can facilitate more even forage utilization and sustain higher levels of water quality.

Herding is another way to control livestock movement and enhance desired time of access and placement over the landscape. Herding adds the cost of the herder or rider who moves the animals, but it is very effective.

Hudson says the most overlooked solution to water quality problems linked to livestock is better grazing management. Planned grazing is managing the grazing so that plants have adequate time for recovery after being grazed. In the next Greener Pastures column, I will review planned grazing management and its benefits.

Doug Warnock, retired from Washington State University Extension, lives on a ranch in the Touchet River Valley where he writes about and teaches grazing management. He can be contacted at dwarnockgreenerpastures@gmail.com.

Seven groups sign off on beef checkoff changes

By CAROL RYAN DUMAS
Capital Press

A memorandum of understanding, making changes to the beef current checkoff, was signed March 13 in Denver by seven of the eight organizations working for checkoff reform.

The memo requests an additional \$1 per head assessment, doubling the existing \$1 per head assessment, each time both beef and dairy cattle are sold throughout their lifetime.

The additional money will generate more resources for beef promotion and research, said Scott Stuart, president and CEO of National Livestock Producers Association and co-chairman of the Beef Checkoff Enhancement Working Group.

"It's absolutely something to celebrate," Stuart said.

The organizations involved in the working group came together more than three years ago to bring meaningful change to the checkoff and provide for addi-

tional needed resources, he said.

Raising more money for beef promotion and research has been a goal for most industry organizations for some time, but lack of consensus on how the program is operated has stymied efforts.

Unveiled last fall, the proposal met with more pushback. The National Farmers Union withdrew from the working group, and fellow working group member U.S. Cattlemen's Association refused to support it.

Both contend the plan fails to make any meaningful structural reform to how the checkoff operates. They contend there's a conflict of interest in allowing national lobbying organizations contracting for checkoff dollars to participate in the nominating committee that selects members of the operating committee, which decides who receives contracts.

Their primary concern has been with National Cattlemen's

Beef Association's influence in the checkoff program through its state affiliates, the Federation of State Beef Councils, which serve on the nominating committee and hold half the seats on the operating committee.

Stuart said he understands the concerns, but the working committee looked at whether the checkoff needed to be torn apart and completely rebuilt.

The group looked at structural changes, he said, and seven of the eight organizations feel the checkoff has "a very workable structure," with capable people serving on the committees and a number of qualified contractors.

But it did make changes to make the structure more inclusive, he said.

Currently, the nominating committee consists of seven members from The Federation of State Beef Councils and eight members from the Cattlemen's Beef Board. The MOU changes that structure to include seven members each from the Cattle-

men's Beef Board, the Federation of State Beef Councils and industry organizations at large, he said.

"It opens up the process to make it more transparent, more inclusive," he said.

But Jon Wooster, U.S. Cattlemen's Association past president, said the MOU compounds the conflict of interest concern by putting national organizations that are contracting for checkoff dollars on the nominating committee.

The Association abstained from signing the MOU on Friday, stating "the makeup of the working group has changed since its inception and it seems its main goal is now to increase the assessment with no consideration to structural changes."

The memo also proposes a provision that would refund the additional \$1 checkoff assessment to checkoff payers if requested, which was an important item to U.S. Cattlemen's Association and NFU, he said.

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Livestock Auctions

Washington
TOPPENISH
(Toppenish Livestock Auction)
(USDA Market News)
Moses Lake, Wash.
March 12

This week	Last week	Last year
2200	1500	1600

Compared to March 5 at the same market, not enough stocker or feeder steers last week for accurate trends, however a higher undertone was noted due in part to increased receipts and buyer attendance. Stocker and feeder heifers \$3.00-4.00 higher. Trade very active with very good demand. Slaughter cows \$5.00-6.00 lower, due in part to lack luster beef demand ahead of the Easter holiday.

Slaughter bulls \$5.00-6.00 higher. Trade slow to moderate with moderate to good demand. Slaughter cows 54 percent, Slaughter bulls 5 percent, and feeders 41 percent of the supply. The feeder supply included 47 percent steers and 53 percent heifers. Near 73 percent of the run weighed over 600 lbs.

Feeder Steers: Medium and Large 1-2: 400-500 lbs. \$267.50-280.00; 400-500 lbs. \$272.50, Thin Fleshed: 500-600 lbs. \$272.50-284.00; 500-600 lbs. \$249.00-255.00, Full: 600-700 lbs. \$230.00-239.50; 600-700 lbs. \$245.00-246.00, Thin Fleshed: 700-800 lbs. \$210.00-217.00; 700-800 lbs. \$177.50-189.00, Full: 800-900 lbs. \$192.50-199.00.

Medium and Large 2-3: 600-700 lbs. \$220.00.

Large 1-2: 1200-1300 lbs. \$141.00. Small and Medium 1-2: 500-600 lbs. \$240.00. Small and Medium 2-3: 500-600 lbs. \$185.00, Yearlings: Medium and Large 1-2: 400-500 lbs. \$277.50.

Feeder Bulls: Small and Medium 1-2: 400-500 lbs. \$240.00, Full.

Feeder Heifers: Medium and Large 1-2: 400-500

lbs. \$254.00-260.00; 500-600 lbs. \$229.50-245.00; 500-600 lbs. \$249.00-250.00, Thin Fleshed: 600-700 lbs. \$225.00-237.00; 600-700 lbs. \$239.00-239.50, Thin Fleshed; 700-800 lbs. \$191.00-195.50; 700-800 lbs. \$173.00, Full: 700-800 lbs. \$196.00, Replacement; 800-900 lbs. \$170.00. Large 1-2: 1100-1200 lbs. \$130.00-139.00. Large 2-3: 1200-1300 lbs. \$135.50; 1300-1400 lbs. \$134.50-136.50. Small and Medium 1-2: 300-400 lbs. \$257.50; 400-500 lbs. \$237.50; 500-600 lbs. \$207.50, Full. Small and Medium 2-3: 600-700 lbs. \$221.00.

Idaho
CALDWELL
Treasure Valley Livestock
March 13

Steers: 300-400 lbs. \$263.50; 400-500 lbs. \$288.50; 500-600 lbs. \$233.75; 600-700 lbs. \$211.25; 700-800 lbs. \$166.25; 800-900 lbs. \$177.50; 900-1000 lbs. \$163.25; 1000 and up, \$139.

Heifers (wt.): 300-400 lbs. \$239.50; 400-500 lbs. \$234.25; 500-600 lbs. 207.75; 600-700 lbs. \$194.00; 700-800 lbs. \$ 139; 800-900 lbs. \$148.45; 900-1000 lbs. \$132.75; 1000 lbs. and up, \$121.25.

Cow (wt.) 700-800 lbs. \$73; 800-900 lbs. \$73.50; 900-1000 lbs. \$105.75; 1000-1100 lbs. \$100.75; 1100-1200 lbs. \$101.75; 1200-1300 lbs. \$96.25; 1300-1400 lbs. \$96.25; 1400-1500 lbs. \$99; 1500-1600 lbs. \$103.50; 1600-1700 lbs. \$101; 1700-1800 lbs. \$104; 1800-1900, \$106.50.

Bull calves (wt.) 300-400 lbs. \$340; 400-500 lbs. \$232.25; 500-600 lbs. \$216; 600-700 lbs. \$206.25; 700-800 lbs. \$157.50; 800-900 lbs. \$185; 900-1000 lbs. \$157.25; 1000-1100 lbs. \$227.50; 1100-1200 lbs. \$122.50; 1200-1300 lbs. \$111; 1300-1400 lbs. \$121; 1400-1500 lbs. \$118.

Bulls (wt.) 1500-1600 lbs. \$121; 1800-1900 lbs. \$122.25; 1900-2000 lbs. \$126