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MEAT QUALITY DEBATE

TO CLONE, OR NOT TO CLONE



Courtesy of West Texas A&M University

Students pose with Alpha, a cloned bull intended to sire cattle with a higher grade meat. The university's cloning project began in 2010 and has produced two bulls and three heifers. Their offspring are being evaluated for meat quality.

Ag groups say Coba will be hard to replace

Oregon director praised for management style

By ERIC MORTENSON and CLAIRE WITHYCOMBE
Capital Press

Oregon farm organizations are still absorbing news of longtime Oregon Department of Agriculture Director Katy Coba's appointment as the state's chief operating officer and director of the Department of Administrative Services.

Word spread quickly through Oregon's agricultural groups Wednesday morning. Coba used her 11:30 a.m. budget conference call with producer organizations to tell them first-hand.



Katy Coba

"It's a hard one for me," said Katie Fast, executive director of Oregonians for Food and Shelter. Coba's appointment as DAS director is probably a good move for Oregon in terms of good government because of her experience and management skill, she said.

"However, for Oregon agriculture, we're all at a little bit of a loss," she said. "Those are some big shoes to move into."

Fast said Coba has been a strong advocate for Oregon ag at the state Legislature. She's also overseen a department management structure that is collaborative with staff and with the industries they regulate, and the industry will want to see that continued in the next director, Fast said.

Jerome Rosa, executive director of the Oregon Cattlemen's Association, said Coba's departure from ODA is "a huge loss to Oregon agriculture."

Rosa said Coba is the longest serving state ag director in the country and has done a "tremendous job." He said her marketing background is unparalleled and has helped commodity groups.

Rosa served on the Oregon Board of Agriculture, which advises Coba and the department, before taking the job with the cattlemen's association. In both positions, "Her door was always open and very accessible to me," he said. "She always made time."

Rosa said he hopes the next director will take a similar approach.

Dave Dillon, executive vice president of the Oregon Farm Bureau, said it's premature to talk about possible successors. He said Coba was a successful director because she understood the industry, collaborated with producers and kept the department from being "politicized."

"In my view, Katy's been a director who wants to make sure decisions are made on good principles, good science, and are thoughtful — not ideological," Dillon said.

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Copying cattle can yield top USDA beef grading status, but is that what consumers want?

By ERIC MORTENSON | Capital Press

Lawrence still talks about it as his "lightbulb" moment. He was in a Texas slaughterhouse in 2010 when two absolutely beautiful beef carcasses rolled by. Each was the pinnacle of USDA grading: "Prime" and "Yield Grade One."

Only 2 to 5 percent of U.S. beef is graded Prime, and Yield Grade One meant there was lots of it. By Lawrence's estimate, only 1 in 3,300 beef carcasses will have those two attributes simultaneously. And here went two of them within a couple minutes of each other.

What happened next was either scientific breakthrough or unnecessary genetic fiddling, depending on your perspective. And it poses a conundrum for cattle producers and researchers in the Pacific Northwest, Northern California and beyond.

Lawrence, a professor of meat science at West Texas A&M University, called his department head that night and proposed forming a research team. Here's what he wanted to do: Clone a herd of superior cattle by working backwards from superior beef.

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Tom Fox/The Dallas Morning News via AP

Kansas City strip steaks cut from beef strip loin from some of the 13 Alpha X Gamma steers born and raised at West Texas A&M University are displayed at the university's meat laboratory in Canyon, Texas. The steers were the offspring of Alpha, a cloned bull, and cloned heifers called Gamma 1, 2, and 3.



Beef carcasses await further processing. Texas researchers are now cloning cattle to attain specific USDA grading traits, but Pacific Northwest producers say their customers would likely reject the technology.

Courtesy of Reg Keddle, Dayton Natural Meats

Washington targets entire wolf pack in Ferry County

County poised to take over if WDFW stops short

By DON JENKINS
Capital Press

The Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife announced on Aug. 19 that it plans to kill the entire Profanity Peak pack in Ferry County to stop attacks on livestock.

Just one day earlier, WDFW had stopped hunting for the pack, noting that there was no evidence of wolf attacks since the department shot two of the pack's 11 members on Aug 5, leaving four adults and five pups.

The next day, however, WDFW investigators determined wolves had injured another calf and probably killed two others.

WDFW not only resumed the hunt, but also ramped up the operation from

"partial removal" to eliminating the entire pack.

Since July 8, the Profanity Peak pack has killed or injured at least seven cattle, according to WDFW. Investigators determined the pack probably killed five other cattle, but those depredations were not absolutely confirmed as wolf attacks.

Ferry County officials received a report Monday that WDFW had shot a third wolf. WDFW has limited its

release of information to weekly updates and had not confirmed the report by mid-week.

Ferry County commissioners have asked WDFW to exterminate the pack since 2014, saying the wolves are a threat to public safety.

Commissioners last week authorized the sheriff's office to lethally remove the pack if WDFW does not.

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