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R-CALF White House petition drive falls short

By **MATTHEW WEAVER**
Capital Press



Matthew Weaver/Capital Press File

R-CALF CEO Bill Bullard says his organization's petition to ban beef from Brazil until country of origin labeling is reinstated fell short.

A spokesman for rival National Cattlemen's Beef Association told the Capital Press when the petition was first announced in April that a blanket ban was "purely political" and had no scientific basis, and that U.S. inspectors would prevent the questionable beef from entering the

food supply.

A Facebook discussion in January explaining cattle industry issues with conservative talk show host Tomi Lahren, formerly of The Blaze TV, led R-CALF to anticipate bigger numbers. That discussion received hundreds of thousands of views, Bullard said.

"The reality is that there is very little we can do in agriculture that attracts that kind of attention," he said. "It's very difficult to get the public enthused and interested in issues affecting the cattle industry, but we keep trying and we'll continue to keep trying."

If a topic conducive to a petition format presented itself, Bullard is game to try again.

"Petitions, letters, letters to the editor and the videos we've done are all means by

which we attempt to communicate to the public about the importance of the issues we're working on," he said.

The petition was part of R-CALF's continuing campaign to restore country-of-origin labeling, Bullard said.

Bullard and R-CALF submitted a nine-page fact sheet and white paper about reinstating COOL to Peter Navarro, director of the White House National Trade Council. R-CALF has not received a reply, Bullard said.

"We certainly did not have all of our eggs in the petition basket," he said. "This was simply one part of an overall strategy to convince the new administration it is extremely important that U.S. cattle producers be able to distinguish their product in the marketplace."

R-CALF has 5,000 members in 43 states, Bullard said.

What's Upstream followed EPA's counsel on lobbying

Farm group leader: Loophole created

By **DON JENKINS**
Capital Press

What's Upstream deliberately avoided advocating specific legislation while lobbying for mandatory 100-foot buffers between farms and water in Washington, in keeping with legal counsel from the Environmental Protection Agency, according to newly available EPA records.

The records, released in response to a Freedom of Information Act request, document for the first time that the campaign's lead organizer, the Swinomish Indian tribe, consciously made only a general call for buffers in a letter-writing campaign to state legislators in 2016.

The tactic paid off this year as federal and state watchdog agencies this year absolved the EPA-funded campaign of wrongdoing, concluding in separate investigations that the appeal to lawmakers was too vague to be considered lobbying, even though the self-stated goal of the media and letter-writing blitz was to influence the votes of legislators.

In an email to colleagues shortly before the 2016 legislative session, EPA Puget Sound grants coordinator Lisa Chang referred to a form letter that could be sent to lawmakers from the What's Upstream website. The letter urged lawmakers to consider requiring buffers.

Chang, who repeatedly raised concerns about the campaign's accuracy and tone, stated that the EPA's Office of Regional Counsel had advised that "the concern with this feature would be if the letter advocated for/against a specific piece of legislation, ballot mea-

sure, initiative, etc."

Federal law bars lobbying with federal funds, but the EPA's Office of Inspector General reported this month that the \$432,955 spent on What's Upstream was allowed because the campaign did not cite specific legislation.

Gerald Baron, director of Save Family Farming, which filed the FOIA request, said Monday that the EPA's regional counsel "created a loophole" that the inspector general accepted.

"What if the tables were turned? What if the EPA was supporting a group that wanted to repeal Washington environmental laws?" he asked. "Would the people who defend the EPA choose to defend them? We have to look at the principle and not the specific issue."

Efforts to reach the EPA and Swinomish tribe Monday were unsuccessful.

The EPA has been periodically releasing batches of records related to What's Upstream in response to FOIA requests. The Swinomish, a north Puget Sound tribe, obtained an EPA grant through the Northwest Indian Fisheries Commission. The tribe hired Seattle lobbying firm Strategies 360 and recruited several environmental groups to help promote the campaign.

Farm groups and some federal lawmakers viewed the advocacy campaign as a federally funded smear against agriculture. Two senators requested the inspector general's audit last spring.

Several months before that, the EPA heard grumbling about the What's Upstream website, which used stock photos taken outside the state to buttress the claim that farmers are unregulated polluters of water.

USDA reignites debate over organic livestock, poultry rule

By **CAROL RYAN DUMAS**
Capital Press



Stephen Ausmus/ARS

The new organic rule for poultry and livestock has been delayed again, reopening a debate among industry groups.

Citing significant policy and legal issues warranting further review, USDA is delaying for six months the effective date of the Organic Livestock and Poultry Practices final rule, reigniting a debate over what it should include.

The rule was set to take effect May 19 after the original March 20 effective date was extended by an executive order that froze pending regulations for 60 days to allow review by the Trump administration.

The rule amends the organic livestock and poultry production requirements by adding new provisions for avian living conditions and livestock handling and transport for slaughter.

It also expands and clarifies requirements for livestock care and production practices and mammalian living conditions.

USDA's Agricultural Marketing Service, which administers the National Organic Program, is now extending the effective date to Nov. 14 and asking the public for comment on whether to let rule become effective, suspend it indefinitely, delay it or withdraw it.

The move frustrates the Organic Trade Association, which contends the rule — more than a decade in the making — is widely supported by consumers and organic producers and certifiers.

"An additional six-month delay is unnecessary, and in fact kicks the can down the road once again in typical Washington fashion. This is a blatant

example of the D.C. machine evading a transparent public process," OTA said in a statement to Capital Press.

"We are frustrated that a final rule having gone through such extensive public and industry feedback and official scrutiny is now being stopped. It is just plain wrong," OTA stated.

The organization calls the rule a critical, comprehensive and well-thought-out regulation and said killing it will damage the vibrant U.S. organic sector and rural communities.

Conventional livestock and poultry groups, however, welcome the delay and object to the rule on many fronts.

National Pork Producers Council is pleased the administration has further delayed the rule, said Dave Warner, NPPC director of communications.

"We will submit comments, urging USDA to scrap this ill-advised, costly and largely unworkable regulation, which is not science-based and

would present real challenges to protecting animal and public health," he said.

NPPC's list of objections — shared by many livestock and poultry groups — begins with the contention that animal-handling practices are not a defining characteristic of organic agriculture and are not germane to the National Organic Program as authorized by Congress.

Consumer misconception — the supposed reason USDA proposed the rule — about the intent of the program and the meaning of its label is not a valid rationale for expanding it to encompass animal welfare, Warner said.

In addition, the proposed livestock practices will be costly, if even practicable, to implement for current organic producers and serve as a barrier to new producers entering organic production, without making the resulting products substantively more organic, he said.

"Animal welfare is complex and dynamic; decisions

about animal care need to be science-based and carefully considered by each producer," he said.

And the proposed rule presents significant challenges to the maintenance and promotion of public and animal health.

For example, people can get trichinellosis — a serious illness — by eating raw or undercooked meat from animals infected by the trichinae parasite, which has been largely eliminated from the U.S. commercial swine herd.

The rule would require access to the outdoors, and outdoor production — specifically allowing pigs to forage and root in soil — is the major route of introduction for the trichinae parasite to pigs, he said.

"Increased cases of trichinae in organic pork would lead to consumer trust problems for all pork products and to distrust of U.S. pork from foreign trading partners, in addition to public health ramifications," he said.

Butter skyrockets to 17-month high

By **LEE MIELKE**
For the Capital Press

Dairy Markets
Lee Mielke



Spot butter rocketed to \$2.2625 per pound Friday, up 15 1/2-cents on the week and 22 1/2-cents above a year ago, with 24 cars sold last week.

The precious gold jumped 5 3/4-cents Monday and pole vaulted 11 cents Tuesday, to \$2.43, highest spot price since Dec. 9, 2015.

Ice cream producers have yet to pull down the cream supply, as weather has been cool and wet in the Central U.S. Retail butter sales were reportedly slower.

Western butter makers report demand is steady. Some predict a slight increase in exports the next few months, hopeful that will keep inventories in check as butter stocks are heavy and growing.

Cash Grade A nonfat dry milk finished Friday at 86 1/4-cents per pound, up 1 3/4-cents on the week and 4 3/4-cents above a year ago. Monday saw the powder gain

2 cents and hold there Tuesday at 88 1/4-cents, the highest price since Feb. 15, 2017.

CME cheese prices also shot higher last week, then pulled back some, but are climbing again. cheddar blocks hit \$1.65 per pound Thursday but closed Friday at \$1.6350, up 3 1/2-cents on the week, after jumping 12 cents the previous week, and were 35 1/2-cents above a year ago.

The barrels closed at \$1.53, up 8 cents on the week and 21 cents above a year ago. Thirteen cars of block and 25 of barrel were sold last week at the CME.

ISDA dairy chief retires, will lead Milk Producers of Idaho

By **CAROL RYAN DUMAS**
Capital Press

Marv Patten, longtime dairy bureau chief at the Idaho State Department of Agriculture, is retiring this month and will head the Milk Producers of Idaho starting next month.

Just shy of 40 years with the department, Patten said he decided to retire when a "new opportunity came along," adding it would be inappropriate to discuss his next move while he is still on the job with the agency.

The board of directors for Milk Producers of Idaho has announced that Patten will be

the organization's new executive director, effective June 1.

In a post for Food Producers of Idaho, the MPI board stated: "Many of us have appreciated and relied on Marv's wise counsel over the years as he has worked to help us comply with the growing regulatory requirements our industry faces. ... The MPI Board has every expectation that having Marv squarely on our team will benefit dairy producers enormously."

Patten said he submitted his notice of retirement on May 5 and his last day is May 19.

ISDA Deputy Director Brian Oakey confirmed that notice

of retirement, saying the agency will provide a statement on Patten's career later today.

Patten said he began his tenure at the agency in 1977 as a compliance officer for several programs. He moved to the position of dairy inspector in 1982 and the following year became dairy program supervisor. In 1984, he was named chief of the dairy bureau.

"I am going to miss a hellacious number of people, great camaraderie, great staff. Staff makes or breaks you, and I've been so blessed to have some great, great people," he said.

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