

U.S. Wheat: ‘Slight possibility’ U.S. could re-enter TPP

Conner: NAFTA, KORUS discussions have eased back from withdrawal

By MATTHEW WEAVER
Capital Press

There’s a “slight possibility” the U.S. could re-enter the Trans-Pacific Partnership, a high-ranking U.S. Wheat Associates official says.

“If you’d asked me two months ago I would have said it’s not going to happen,” said Ben Conner, vice president of policy for U.S. Wheat. “But the president and others have been occasionally floating the possibility of negotiating with TPP countries individually or as a group since.”

It remains to be seen what it will take for that to happen, Conner said. The wheat industry needs to make the point about the effects of withdrawing from TPP “as often as possible,” he said.

The U.S. wheat industry is alarmed about the potential damage to its overseas market share after President Donald Trump withdrew from the trade deal last year.

“We hope wheat farmers



Dan Wheat/Capital Press File

A high-level U.S. Wheat Associates official says the industry must keep up its pressure on the Trump administration to re-enter the Trans-Pacific Partnership trade agreement. Nearly 90 percent of the wheat grown in the Northwest is exported to Pacific Rim customers.

are constantly talking about TPP to their family and neighbors, and working with their state wheat associations to let legislatures, governors, congressional delegations, U.S. Trade Representative and USDA know their positions on this,” Conner said.

Discussions on the North American Free Trade Agree-

ment, or NAFTA, and U.S. Korea Free Trade Agreement, or KORUS, have eased, Conner said. Trump was on the verge of withdrawing from both agreements, he said.

“It’s still very much a risk that we could withdraw, but at least we’re negotiating with the agreements intact so far,” Conner said.

But concerns remain. Some of the proposals the U.S. has put forward are unacceptable to Mexico and Canada, and to much of the U.S. business and trade community, Conner said.

“If the U.S. is unwilling to back off, it could make reaching an agreement impossible and lead to the president fol-

lowing through on his threat,” Conner said.

With the departure of Gary Cohn from the National Economic Council, the “nationalist” faction encouraging withdrawal may have more clout, Conner said. The new steel and aluminum tariffs also don’t help the conversation, since Trump has explicitly tied exclusions

for Mexico and Canada to a successful NAFTA negotiation.

Conner isn’t sure whether the U.S. Trade Representative will tie any NAFTA proposal to continued exclusions, though he said the other parties aren’t likely to appreciate negotiating “with the proverbial gun to the head.”

Maintaining the status quo on market access would be a positive, Conner said, “since on every front our trade policy is re-plowing the same ground — NAFTA, KORUS — or making things worse — steel/aluminum tariffs.”

“TPP-11 is one very important area where we’re losing market access, so the administration’s seeming openness to that is an unrealized positive,” he said.

U.S. Wheat is also monitoring continued blocking of new appointments by the U.S. to the WTO Appellate Body, which hears appeals of reports issued by panels in disputes brought by WTO members. The Appellate Body can uphold, modify or reverse legal findings and conclusions of a panel. Once adopted by the Dispute Settlement Body, Appellate Body Reports must be accepted by the parties to the dispute, according to the WTO.

\$6 million gift bolsters Linfield wine education

By MATEUSZ PERKOWSKI
Capital Press

A recent \$6 million gift intends to bolster wine education at Oregon’s Linfield College, but the school won’t compete head-on with other regional wine programs.

The donation from Grace and Ken Evenstad — founders of Domain Serene Winery near Dayton, Ore. — instead means to help Linfield cultivate its niche in “soft skills and leadership skills” for wine students, said Greg Jones, Linfield’s director of wine education.

“We don’t have the intention of becoming the next viticulture and enology school,” Jones said.

The \$6 million will endow the college’s chair in wine studies, the wine program’s operations as well as the construction of a wine laborato-

ry at Linfield’s new science complex building.

Viticulture and wine-making programs have already been established at Oregon State University, Chemeketa Community College and Umpqua Community College.

While Linfield’s curriculum doesn’t ignore vineyard and wine fundamentals, its students focus on marketing, hospitality, tourism and other fields that together contribute to wine industry’s \$5.5 billion impact on Oregon’s economy, Jones said.

“Most of that is tied to experience,” he said.

Linfield has discussed its wine program with other regional universities to ensure wine studies credits are transferable among the institutions, Jones said.

Attending more than one program can allow students to

specialize their education.

For example, a student with a two-year degree from Chemeketa can then enroll at Linfield to earn a four-year degree that encompasses wine industry management, Jones said. Students also have opportunities to seek advanced degrees at other institutions.

Currently, Linfield offers a minor in wine studies but expects to have a curriculum ready for a major by autumn of 2018.

The college is looking to create unique pathways for students, such as majoring in chemistry and minoring in wine studies, Jones said. That experience would then be useful for a graduate degree.

To obtain a major or minor, Linfield students will be expected to attain a “core knowledge” in wine geography, wine making, wine business operations and sensory

analysis, he said.

They’re also encouraged to study abroad, with the possibility of earning credits at schools in the Burgundy, Champagne, Loire and Provence regions of France.

“This will make the broader talent pool the industry needs that much deeper,” Jones said of Linfield’s over-

all wine program.

Grace and Ken Evenstad were drawn to the broad nature of wine education at Linfield, said Matt Thompson, marketing director for Domaine Serene Winery.

“It covers all bases,” he said. “They really fell in love with the idea of an interdisciplinary look.”

The wine industry requires specialization partly because its sales channels are distinctive, Thompson said. Wine is sold direct-to-consumer as well as through the “three tiered” model of producers, wholesalers and retailers.

“The way you approach these markets is unique,” he said.

Judge hears arguments in ranchers’ label lawsuit

By MATTHEW WEAVER
Capital Press

SPOKANE — A U.S. district judge heard arguments Tuesday in a lawsuit two rancher organizations brought against the USDA seeking to force meatpackers to retain the identity of foreign beef and pork all the way to the grocery store.

Judge Rosanna Malouf Peterson heard from attorneys for R-CALF, Cattle Producers of Washington and USDA March 13 in the Eastern District of Washington court in Spokane. Both sides are seeking a summary judgment, meaning they are asking the judge to rule on the case as a matter of law before it goes to trial.

In the lawsuit, the cattle organizations argue that the Federal Meat Inspection Act incorporates Tariff Act requirements, including one that states certain imported meats must bear country-of-origin labels through to retail, and that USDA’s failure to enforce that is “unlawful,” said David Muraskin, food project attorney with the non-profit Public Justice law firm, which represents R-CALF and the Cattle Producers of Washington.

They argue that the USDA allows meatpackers to reclassify foreign meat as a domestic product by rewrapping it.

The federal government argued that Congress did not want to require USDA to enforce the Tariff Act, Muraskin said. The Tariff Act is overseen by customs and border patrol, while the Meat Inspection Act is overseen by USDA, Muraskin said.

“I think consumers want to know where their food came from, so it’s interesting to me the gov-



Matthew Weaver/Capital Press

Attorneys for R-CALF and Cattle Producers of Washington laid out their arguments over a summary judgment in a lawsuit against USDA before a U.S. district judge March 13 in Spokane.

ernment is in a position where they are trying to assist the meat companies in hiding that information,” said Scott Nielsen, CPOW president and a Kettle Falls, Wash., rancher.

“What is so startling about this case is that the Trump administration ran on helping American producers,” Muraskin said.

The rule would be “the easiest thing possible to do” to help American producers, he said. “We’re just saying, ‘Enforce the rule as written.’”

Muraskin said the timeline for Peterson’s ruling is uncertain, but it likely to take least a month or two.

“This court is very efficient, so we’re hopeful, but you never can tell,” he said.

“I think a judge’s job is to look out for citizens and consumers, and I think that puts us on the same side as the judge,” Nielsen said.

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