

R-CALF pushes back on contract library bill

By CAROL RYAN DUMAS
Capital Press

WASHINGTON, D.C. — While other cattle and farm groups are supporting House legislation aimed at better transparency in the fed cattle markets, R-CALF USA says the bill doesn't address the core problem in the industry — a lack of competition in the meatpacking industry.

The Contract Library Act of 2021, H.R. 5609, was introduced on Wednesday by Reps. Dusty Johnson, R-S.D., and Henry Cuellar, D-Texas, with 16 cosponsors. It would establish a contract library at USDA to track and report terms of alternative marketing agreements for fed cattle purchases by meatpackers.

The bill is a response to calls by cattle producers to increase the transparency of those agreements used to purchase cattle that aren't purchased in the negotiated cash market, where the price is determined through buyer-seller interaction on the day of sale.

R-CALF's board of directors reviewed the bill and determined it doesn't address the competition-disrupting leverage the highly concentrated beef packers now hold over the cattle market.

"The problem with our broken market is not that we don't know the details of the contracts that confer market leverage to the packers," said Eric Nelson, R-CALF director and an Iowa cattle feeder.

"The problem is there are too many contracts and because of that, our price discovery market is being destroyed," he said.

The 50/14 bill, S.949, introduced by Sens. Chuck Grassley, R-Iowa, and Jon Tester, D-Mont., addresses this problem by increasing the volume in the price discovery market and decreasing the volume of contracted cattle, he said.

That bill would require large packers to purchase 50% of their cattle through cash markets and require the cattle be harvested within 14 days.

"I want to continue selling cattle in the price discovery market, but only if Congress preserves it will I have that chance," Nelson said.

"Putting a contract library ahead of taking action to preserve our price discovery market sends a signal that more contracts are good and more producers should try to access them. This is not what is needed," Nelson said.

Bill Bullard, R-Calf CEO, said his group is also concerned with the new cattle procurement methods now in use that do not specifically fit within the categories established in the contract library bill, such as agreements involving packer-owned cattle.

"We'll continue our assessment of the contract library bill, but we first have to restore genuine competition to the cattle market that is not returning the cost of production to our cattle-producing member," he said.

The North American Meat Institute is asking members of Congress to pause the legislation and include packers in the conversation, since packers would bear the burden of the government mandate.

"More time is needed to consider how the bill will affect livestock producers, feedlot operators and packers and processors, said Julie Anna Potts, Meat Institute's president and CEO.

"There is already robust price discovery provided by beef packers on a daily basis. We urge members of Congress to slow down and to first do no harm," she said.

The Meat Institute and its members will work with the Congress to address any unintended consequences, she said.

Hazelnut harvest beats the heat

By GEORGE PLAVEN
Capital Press

SALEM — Freshly harvested hazelnuts arrive by the truckload at Chapin Dehydrating LLC, where they are washed and dried for packaging.

Bruce Chapin, who runs the receiving station north of Salem, is so far pleased with what he sees. He anticipates the crop will be roughly on par with last year's record haul of 61,000 tons, despite challenging conditions that have kept Willamette Valley growers on their toes.

"We had a very dry summer," Chapin said. "As a result, we're seeing smaller nuts coming in here."

In addition to the heat and drought, a major ice storm in February severely damaged some orchards, with branches or, in some cases, whole trees breaking under pressure.

A shortage of workers at the USDA National Agricultural Statistics Service means the industry did not receive its annual crop forecast, but hazelnut growers say they are seeing



Courtesy of Tim Aman

Wooden totes are filled with hazelnuts recently harvested at Aman Bros. LLC in Mt. Angel.

decent yields and good quality after weathering a difficult year.

"I think we were basically flush or maybe even up a bit," said Tim Aman, of Aman Bros. LLC, which farms 180 acres of hazelnuts near Mt. Angel, Ore.

Aman said the February ice storm devastated their older orchards, snapping branches off the upper two-thirds of the trees. Instead of harvesting 3,000 to 5,000 pounds per acre, yields were 1,000 pounds per acre.

"It was like a bomb went off," he said. "When you get an inch of ice that builds up on both sides of the branch, there's nothing that can withstand that."

Younger orchards, however, were not nearly as damaged. Varieties such as Jefferson and McDonald continue to increase production as they come into full maturity, making up for losses elsewhere on the farm, Aman said.

Oregon produces nearly all U.S. hazelnuts, with acreage more than doubling over the last decade to approximately 80,000 acres.

Aman said their orchards were less affected by drought, since the trees are irrigated.

For dryland growers like Jay Price, the effects of drought were more pronounced.

Price, who farms about

20 acres in Oregon's Yamhill County, said the lack of rain means nut size is down from last year. He is also concerned the "heat dome" in June that brought temperatures as high as 117 degrees may stunt the growth of some younger orchards.

"It would have been a tough year to have a new planting, I think, if you didn't have irrigation," Price said.

Ryan Flaherty, grower relations manager for Hazelnut Growers of Oregon, a co-op with more than 200 member farmers, said harvest was 75-80% finished as of Oct. 20. Overall, he said, crop quality has been good with few cases of mold, rancidity or insect damage.

While the heat dome did cause leaves to wilt and burn on hazelnut trees, it did not necessarily affect this year's crop, Flaherty said. As for 2022, that remains to be seen.

"It just seems like those trees shut down during that intense heat," he said, noting that trees were still growing new fruiting wood to set next year's crop.

Bend senator named GOP leader

GARY A. WARNER
Oregon Capital Bureau

SALEM — Sen. Tim Knopp of Bend was named the new state Senate Republican leader in a surprise announcement on Friday, Oct. 22.

Sen. Fred Girod, R-Stayton, the leader during the 2021 legislative session, said he was stepping down immediately due to unspecified health concerns.

"Republicans have a great opportunity to showcase our ideas and vision as a viable alternative to decades of failed Democratic leadership in Oregon," Knopp said in a statement. "I look forward to serving this caucus to do just that."

Knopp immediately steps into the job leading the GOP in the Senate, where Democrats hold an 18-seat supermajority in the 30-member Senate. He inherits a fractured group of GOP lawmakers.

It was unclear Friday how

many of the senators voted on Knopp's elevation to minority leader and how many who were originally elected as Republicans consider themselves part of the caucus or independents.

Adding to the internal drama is Sen. Dallas Heard, R-Roseburg, who was elected Oregon Republican Party chair early this year on a platform that the party was not supportive enough of ex-President Donald Trump and needed to push harder against Gov. Kate Brown and anti-pandemic efforts like mandatory mask-wearing, business restrictions and promoting vaccination.

During the 2021 session, Heard was among a group of lawmakers supporting a walk-out over a controversial gun control bill.

Girod, Knopp and other veteran Republican lawmakers opted to vocally oppose the legislation, but not bring the Legislature to a full stop by denying

the minimum 20-member quorum to do any business, as had occurred in earlier walkouts in 2019 and 2020.

Girod, whose home had burned down during the Labor Day fires in 2020, was the target of rage by bitter conservative activists who branded those who want to stay in the Capitol as "traitors." Girod and Sen. Bill Hansell, R-Athena, confirmed they were among senators who received death threats that were reported to the Oregon State Police. No arrests were made.

Leading the Senate GOP members is Knopp's second stint as a legislative leader. He was House Majority Leader during part of his three terms representing Bend in the House from 1999 to 2005.

Knopp did not seek re-election in 2004 and was out of state politics for seven years. In 2012 he successfully challenged incumbent Sen. Chris Telfer,

R-Bend.

Knopp won about 60% of the general election vote in 2012 and 2016. The rapid population increase in Deschutes County and a large turnout of Democrats seeking to defeat Trump in 2020 led to Knopp's closest victory margin: 50.7% over Democrat Eileen Kiely.

Legislators in Oregon serve part-time. Knopp is executive vice president of the Central Oregon Builders Association and the executive director of Building Partners for Affordable Housing.

Knopp has been an advocate of reform to the Public Employee Retirement System, which continues to run up a multi-billion dollar deficit. He was a leader of a successful campaign to alter the Oregon Constitution to include the "kicker," a flat-tax rebate that kicks in when the state takes in a certain amount of money over what it had projected.

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