



Policy Update & Political Outlook

National Cattlemen's Beef Association's (NCBA) Danielle Beck provides an inside look at 2020 and anticipating 2021.

by Kindra Gordon

With 2020 being a year of unprecedented events, "COVID-19 drastically impacted NCBA's policy agenda," shared Danielle Beck while providing a policy update and political outlook during the virtual educational sessions that were part of the American Hereford Association's 2020 Annual Membership Meeting and Conference. Beck is senior executive director of government affairs at NCBA in Washington, D.C.

She explains NCBA's policy priorities at the beginning of 2020 included focused on addressing fake meat oversight, ensuring trade implementation and market access, continuing to push back on misguided climate policies and aggressively pursuing regulatory reforms. However, those issues were largely put on hold as the pandemic took center stage and NCBA worked around the clock to preserve the viability of the U.S. beef supply chain and to minimize economic damages to cattle producers.



Danielle Beck

Beef during the pandemic

During her presentation remarks for the American Hereford Association's Annual Membership Meeting and Conference, National Cattlemen's Beef Association's Danielle Beck reported plant-based meat substitute products actually lost market share in March and April during the early months of the pandemic. Of this Beck says, "Similar to polling for elections and purchasing habits, what consumers say versus what they do can be two very different things."

Meanwhile, Beck shared beef demand was at an all-time high in 2019 for the fourth year in a row, and she adds, "Meat sales in 2020 have only continued to increase." She attributes this trend to consumers seeking out comfort foods during the pandemic. "Consumers love beef," she affirms. **HW**

More recently, Beck reports NCBA has begun working with Congress to address industry issues brought to the surface during the pandemic, including the need for a more stable supply of meat processing capacity, the need for more competition within the marketplace and discussions about more producer ownership of processing facilities.

She points to the RAMP-UP Act, which was introduced in early July and stands for Requiring Assistance to Meat Processors for Upgrading Plants, as one bill NCBA is working on that is designed to help provide federal incentives to improve beef processing capacity. This could allow some smaller processors to achieve federal inspection status which would then allow them to sell meat products across state lines. The legislation would also require the United States Department of Agriculture to work with states and to report on ways to improve the existing Cooperative Interstate Shipment program.

Additionally, Beck shares that NCBA has devoted many staff hours and resources to providing input for the beef industry related to the Coronavirus Food Assistance Program (CFAP). "We've been fighting since rollout of these programs for better assistance to cattle producers," she says. While \$4.3 million in payments did go to the cattle industry — which was the most to any single commodity — she acknowledges the payments were still not completely sufficient to the losses that were sustained in the market.

With the election outcome (anticipated at the time of Beck's remarks and now in the midst of a leadership transition), Beck projects additional COVID relief funding may likely not be reviewed until the first quarter of 2021.

Looking ahead

Of the 2020 election, Beck notes, "Regardless of who wins, half of our country lacks trust in election results. Unrest and distrust are at historical highs." This, she says, is also contributing to the unprecedented time in America, and she adds, "The last thing our country needs is a prolonged amount of uncertainty."

During Trump's presidency, Beck credits him for surrounding himself with people knowledgeable about agriculture. She says this has resulted in a number of positive developments for agriculture producers over the last four years. One of the earliest examples of this is the Tax Cuts and Jobs Act of 2017, which greatly increased the exemption level of the estate, gift and generation skipping tax through 2025 and is a benefit to farm and ranch families.

In the next four years, Beck suggests a Democratic White House with a Republican Senate could result in "a lot of status quo." She encourages constituents involved in both agriculture and beef to stay aware and involved with industry issues, especially as the 117th Congress considers a host of new topics ranging from climate policy to potential changes to the tax code and likely deliberations for the next Farm Bill.

Beck advises, "It remains critically important that producers are communicating with the American public, as well as with your elected officials in Washington, D.C.

Hearing real stories from real producers who come from their hometowns, congressional districts and states is really important and meaningful, and it helps to reinforce the work NCBA is doing here in our nation's capital."

Additionally, as the country moves past the election and the transitions occur at the nation's capital, Beck reports NCBA will continue to work toward "educating new members of Congress and existing members about the importance of livestock and cattle production." As fewer and fewer elected officials have agrarian roots and understanding, she adds, "It's a herculean task that requires all of us working together."

She concludes, "No matter who is in the White House, we at NCBA will continue to fight for beef producers in D.C. We take our responsibility seriously ... We are your boots on the ground and voice in D.C." **HW**