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Senate Plans Mark Up on Horse Slaughter Bill

The Senate Committee on Science, Commerce & Transportation has a planned mark-up session on Wednesday, April 25th for S.311, "The American Horse Slaughter Prevention Act." This means the committee may debate, amend, or rewrite the proposed legislation, and may vote on whether or not to send the bill to the entire Senate for its consideration. We hope you'll take a moment to let your Senators and the Committee know that you oppose S.311 and point out a few facts about horse slaughter so that they understand this bill would make for bad policy. The livestock industry must not allow the emotional rhetoric of some animal rights activists to overwhelm reason. Horse processing is a necessary part of the livestock industry and ensures that a humane, federally-supervised end-of-life option is available for unwanted horses. Livestock Marketing Association (LMA) Vice President for Government and Industry Affairs Nancy Robinson, commenting on e-mails sent to LMA, said "We are already seeing" the impact of the judicially-mandated closure of America's three horse processing plants. That impact, she said, includes a severe drop in the price of horses, and producers who are "greatly concerned about how to dispose" of their horses. Livestock auction managers have been writing that the bottom of the horse market has fallen out and after not being sold at auction, many horses have not been reclaimed by their owners. They'd rather abandon them for the auction house to "deal with." The export of horses to Mexico for slaughter this year is already more than double the number during the same time last year. The current system for humanely dealing with unwanted horses has been working for over 100 years. Now the system is being threatened by activists with broader agricultural agendas and S.311 and HR 503 seek to eliminate it completely. For more information, talking points, and sample letters, visit www.commonhorsesense.com or LMA's Infolink on horse slaughter at www.lmaweb.com/member/Horse/20070413spec22.pdf.

New Law Would Allow Interstate Shipment of State Inspected Meat

U.S. Representative Ron Kind (D-WI) recently introduced new legislation to "expand the markets for meat processing businesses in western Wisconsin and across the nation." H.R. 1760, The Expanding Markets for Small Meat Processors Act, would eliminate the ban on the interstate shipment of state-inspected meat, allowing small meat processors to increase their business and grow local economies. "These unfair restrictions are severely hindering this industry's ability to grow," said Kind. "Trusting other nations, but not our own states, to ship meat across borders just doesn't make sense. This bill will expand the market for Wisconsin products, increase competition, and reduce prices for consumers. I look forward to working with my colleagues on both sides of the aisle, and in the senate, to remove this harmful limit on area meat processors." States often develop their own meat inspection programs to provide the flexibility needed to accommodate small businesses. Although these inspection programs are supposed to be equivalent to federal standards, there are restrictions on the interstate shipment of state-inspected meat. The Expanding Markets for Small Meat Processors Act would eliminate the interstate shipment ban, while ensuring that states maintain their high safety standards. According to Rep. Kind, lifting this restriction would give small meat processors the ability to ship these products in interstate commerce, not only greatly expanding the market for their products, but also benefiting consumers and rural areas.

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SMA, NMA Leaders Visit Washington, D.C.

Last week, a group of 30 plus representatives of the Southwest Meat Association and National Meat Association paid visits to legislators and regulators in a whirlwind visit to Washington, D.C. Along the way, the team also managed to hear from leaders of other important groups, including the newly merged Grocery Manufacturers Association/Food Processors Association, as well as the United Food & Commercial Workers Union.

On Wednesday, the group met with officials from the U.S. Immigration & Customs Enforcement (ICE) offices. Their agency has moved beyond employer sanctions as a means of controlling immigration violations and are now focusing on criminal law enforcement, with particular attention being paid to businesses that knowingly hire illegal aliens. ICE recommended a system of best practices, known collectively as the Image Program, that include credit checks and background screening to prevent illegals from deceiving employers. Later, at a fund-raising luncheon in his honor, House Agriculture Committee Chairman Colin Peterson (D-MN) spoke of his efforts to expedite the Farm Bill and to link Country-of-Origin Labeling to the National Animal ID System. A similar idea was raised during NMA and SMA's meeting with staffers from the House Agriculture Committee and later with staffers from the Senate Agriculture Committee.

Agriculture Secretary Mike Johanns visited with members on Thursday and reemphasized the importance of the close working relationship between USDA and USTR to open export markets to U.S. beef and the importance of developing an animal ID program. Participants discussed with him the importance of finalizing the Minimal Risk 2 rule to open trade with Canada for older animals and thanked him for his efforts to ensure that the agriculture sector is so well represented. The group also met with Deputy Assistant U.S. Trade Representative for Agricultural Affairs Cathleen Enright, the person directly responsible for critical trade negotiations with Korea and Japan. She indicated that while the negotiations with Korea have reached a very critical stage, there is an inherent difficulty in that Korea must still undergo a regulatory risk assessment that is beyond the scope of the negotiations. She also indicated that Korea's decision will be linked to Japan's decision as to when and how to open up trade.

Of the several meetings with legislators and staffers, the most significant was perhaps with Representative Rosa DeLauro (D-CT), chairperson of the House Agriculture Appropriations Subcommittee. DeLauro was preparing for a second round of hearings with Under Secretary Dr. Richard Raymond on the USDA's new Risk-Based Inspection (RBI) initiative and outlined her concerns. Those included the methodology of risk determination, the management of data, the lack of rulemaking, the size of the pilot project and the speed of implementation. The group also met with FSIS Acting Administrator David Goldman, Deputy Administrator Bryce Quick, Assistant Administrator for Field Operations Ken Petersen, Deputy Assistant Administrator for Policy Dan Engeljohn, and Director for Labeling and Consumer Protection Robert Post. Discussion covered Notices 17 & 18, as well as the ongoing revisions to natural labeling and to *Listeria* regulations. Other meetings were held with leaders of GIPSA and AMS to discuss GIPSA's marketing study, organic standards for imports, current thinking on COOL, an update on commodity acquisitions, and other issues. Many thanks to NMA's Jeremy Russell for his summary of these events.

Congress Examines Livestock Marketing Issues

The Senate Agriculture Committee and the House Agriculture Livestock, Dairy, and Poultry Subcommittee held hearings last week to review competition issues affecting the livestock and meat industries. Various farm organizations, producer groups and industry stakeholders expressed a wide variation of opinions on whether Congress should intervene to compel more competition in livestock marketing. John Queen, President of the National Cattlemen's Beef Association (NCBA), who testified before both committees, said, "We ask that the government not tell us how we can or cannot market our cattle." Queen referenced the recent GIPSA "Livestock and Meat Marketing Study," which found that the leading reasons producers participate in alternative marketing arrangements (AMAs) "are the ability to buy or sell higher quality cattle, improve supply chain management, and obtain better prices." The National Pork Producers Council (NPPC) said several bills before Congress could adversely affect pork producers' ability to market their hogs, including a ban on packer ownership and a requirement that packers buy at least 25% of their pigs on the spot market. According to Joy Philippi, pork producer and NPPC past president, "Punitive actions against packers do not necessarily benefit pork producers in the long run unless the packers are clearly in the wrong. We have seen no evidence of this, and Congress must proceed with caution, weighing the costs and benefits of such important public-policy decisions." Conversely, the National Farmers Union (NFU) told the committees that Congress needs to take action to "restore true competition" in the market place. NFU would like the farm bill to include: mandatory country-of-origin labeling; require USDA and all federal agencies enforce the Packers and Stockyards Act and antitrust laws; require contracts to be traded in open, transparent and public markets; and prohibit mandatory arbitration. Senate Ag Committee Chairman Tom Harkin (D-IA) and Chuck Grassley (R-IA) both favor legislation to regulate livestock marketing issues.

Briefly . . .

LEAN Enterprise Workshop Offered at OSU: The Oklahoma Alliance for Manufacturing Excellence and the Food and Agricultural Products Center (FAPC) at Oklahoma State University are offering "LEAN Enterprise 101," a manufacturing workshop for anyone seeking to implement process improvements in their organization. The workshop will be held June 14, 2007 from 8 AM - 4:30 PM at the FAPC; cost is \$250 per person and registration is limited to 18 people. The LEAN principles can be applied to eliminate waste and improve product flow through the value stream and improve communication flow through the office to the production floor. For more information or to register, contact Karen Smith at 405-744-6277 or email karenl.smith@okstate.edu. Online registration is also available at www.fapc.biz/pages/lean.htm.

FSIS to Hold Regulatory Education Session in Oklahoma: FSIS will hold a regulatory education session on April 24 for small and very small plants in Oklahoma. The session will cover a regulatory walk-through of sanitation standard operating procedures, HACCP, and rules of practice regulations. The regulatory education session will be held from 6:30 PM - 8:30 PM, at the Holiday Inn Norman, 1000 N. Interstate Drive, Norman, OK 73072. Online registration forms and information about upcoming sessions can be found at www.fsis.usda.gov/News_&_Events/Outreach_Sessions_SVS_Plants/index.asp. To register by phone, call 800-336-3747.

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California Hog Farm Quarantined: A hog farm in Stanislaus County, California was quarantined after an industrial chemical that has tainted more than 100 brands of pet food was found in pig urine there, state agriculture officials said Thursday. California Department of Agriculture officials believe the melamine came from rice protein concentrate imported from China by a pet food company's facility that sold salvage pet food to the farm for pig feed. Federal officials confirmed they are investigating whether pork products intended for humans were contaminated with melamine, and have also identified three other contaminants in the urine and kidneys of animals sickened or killed after eating the recalled pet foods.