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NBA Weekly Update for June 12, 2020

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New Market Research to Be Unveiled in Virtual Learning Seminar

NBA members attending the Virtual Bison Monday afternoon, June 22nd, will get an inside peek into new market research that can assist bison marketers in

connecting with new customers in the post COVID marketplace.

New Hope Network, the sponsor of Natural Products Expos West and East and the publisher of Natural Foods Merchandiser, is currently conducting a micro survey of consumer on behalf of the National Bison Association to explore the impact of COVID on:

- trial of bison meat and other less conventional proteins
- attributes most important in making protein decisions
- why consumers tried bison and plant-based meat alternatives (plant-based meat alternatives are asked as a point of comparison)
- expected future consumption of bison and plant-based meat alternatives (plant-based meat alternatives are asked as a point of comparison)



The results of this survey will be presented at 1 p.m. on Monday, June 22nd by Carlotta Mast, Senior Vice President of Content for Informa/New Hope Network, and by Eric Pierce, the company's Vice President of Business Insights. New Hope Network is a national leader in the natural products arena.

In April, Mast conducted an on-line presentation of significant research regarding the State and Future of Natural & Organic. Among the information released in that presentation was data indicating that the COVID-19 pandemic is increasing many consumers' commitment to personal health, and to the health of the environment.

Jim Matheson, assistant director of the NBA, said, "We reached out to Carlotta to present some of that information during our virtual learning session, and she offered to conduct some additional research that would highlight trends particularly impacting bison meat in the marketplace."

All sessions during the Week of Virtual Learning are free to NBA members, but participation is limited to 100 people for the live presentation. Members can register to attend the Monday session [here](#). All presentations are being recorded and will be made available to the membership.

The Monday virtual presentation is being sponsored by Turner Bison Exchange.

Presentations on June 24th will focus on Bison Management and Production Tips. Ray Archuleta, Certified Professional Soil Scientist with The Soil Academy, will conduct a session on regenerative agriculture, followed by the official launching of the NBA's Conservation Management Plan." The day will also feature a panel discussion "Selecting Breeders and Feeders" - A panel discussion on animal selection. Speakers TBD. The Wednesday session is being sponsored by 777 Ranch.

Register for Day Two [here](#).

June 26th presentations will center on An Introduction to Bison Management. NBA Executive Director and Assistant Director will kick off the day with an overview of "Why Bison Are Best." Following that presentation viewers will hear "Bison Start-Up Stories and Tips" from Craig Fischer of Sleepy Acres Bison Ranch, and John and Jen Graves, pending bison ranchers. That day's presentations will conclude with the NBA general mid-year membership meeting.

Friday's sessions are being sponsored by Insure My Forage.

Register for Day Three [here](#).

Feel free to contact Matheson at jim@bisoncentral.com for more information.

Bison Included in House Ag Leaders' Request to Secretary Perdue

Four leaders of the U.S. House Ag. Committee this week warned Agriculture Secretary

Sonny Perdue that the methodology USDA is utilizing to determine eligibility for assistance under the Coronavirus Food Assistance Program (CFAP) is excluding scores of producers who are being hit hard by the economic fallout from COVID-19.

The letter to the Secretary penned by Committee Chair Colin Peterson (D-MN), along with subcommittee chairs Jim Costa (D-CA), Stacey E. Plaskett (D-VI) and Filemon Vela, D-TX), specifically mentions bison, potatoes, poultry, aquaculture, nursery crops among others as being unjustly excluded from qualifying for assistance.

“It remains unclear how producers of products that are not sold in cash markets with publicly reported prices (e.g., commodities that sell primarily to retail, farmers’ markets, fast food, and restaurant markets) and suffered significant market losses will meet the price data requirements of the CFAP Notice of Funding Availability. Impacted sectors include domestic aquaculture, bison, poultry, cut flowers, nursery products, and potatoes,” the lawmakers wrote.

“We encourage you to address these situations for this and any future financial assistance distributed through the DFAP final rule to respond to the ongoing public health emergency,” they added.

NBA Executive Director Dave Carter noted, “Bison producers are not alone in experiencing the frustration in trying to qualify for assistance under the USDA’s rules (see Blog below). Even as we connect with poultry producers, potato growers and other ranchers and farmers that we excluded, we are still working to submit information to USDA using their requirements to demonstrate at least a five percent drop in prices between mid-January and mid-April.”

Carter encouraged member to complete the impact survey here to provide any information available to document the impact. The survey will remain open through next Wednesday.

USDA Yardstick Can’t Measure Weight of COVID Impact on Bison

(Blog by Dave Carter)

Suppose you wanted to buy a pen of calves but needed to know the weights.

“No problem,” the owner replies. “In fact, why don’t you weigh them yourself right now? Use this,” he adds, as he hands you a yardstick.

Ludicrous, right?

That’s not too far removed from the situation bison producers are facing as they attempt to use USDA’s rigid yardstick of mid-April prices vs. Mid-January prices to document the weight of COVID-19’s economic impact on our business.

In case you haven’t heard, USDA’s \$16 billion Coronavirus Food Assistance Program (CFAP) unveiled last month solely directed benefits to producers of commodities in which sufficient market data existed to prove at least a five percent decline in prices between mid-January and mid-April.

Now, USDA is offering an additional \$67 million in assistance to producers who weren’t covered in the original announcement, but only if those producers can demonstrate at least a five percent drop in the price they received for their “commodities” between mid-January and mid-April.

Bison are not a commodity. Most ranchers sell their calves once each year, in the period from November to March. The price being offered for calves right now is much lower than in January, but individual producers will not be able to document the impact until they sell the next crop of calves this fall. Can they qualify? Nope.



Twice Annual Marketers' Survey Underway

The National Bison Association's Commercial Marketers are being asked to participate in the twice annual Marketplace Survey, which measures year-over-year supply/demand trends for bison meat.

"This survey is always important, but particularly vital right now as we try to gather information needed to submit to USDA documenting the impact of COVID-19 on our business," said Dave Carter, NBA executive director. "And, the survey will provide the NBA with valuable insight into some of the trends underway as we all navigate the uncertainty in the marketplace right now."

Marketers have until next Wednesday to complete their survey.

Editor's Note: The following news stories were distributed by organizations not affiliated with the National Bison Association. They may not reflect the opinions or the positions held by the NBA on matters such as genetic integrity, animal management, and other issues.



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Are You an Elk Parent or a Bison Parent?

(From Outside)

In late May, while visiting [Vermejo Park Ranch](#) in northern New Mexico, my family and I were out on a wildlife safari in a remote valley when we spotted a newborn elk calf wobbling across the road, trailed by its mother. It was the beginning of calving season, and the baby elk was minutes old, its fur still wet. When it saw us, it flopped to the ground, while the cow bolted in the opposite direction, running up a ridge until she was out of sight. Distressed, we watched the calf flatten itself into the dirt, all alone.

Our guide, Pete, explained, "This is what elk mothers do. When predators approach, they run away, leaving their babies, who aren't strong enough to walk. Most of the time, the mothers come back for their calves but only after the danger has passed." After a minute, we drove on, not wanting to scare the mother away for good, while Pete continued, "Bison mothers do the opposite. After their babies are born, they'll stand their ground, snort, and charge to keep them safe."

Afterward, I couldn't stop thinking about the difference between elk mamas and bison mamas. Their two styles of parenting seemed to encapsulate everything I'd been wrestling with since becoming a mother—the fine line between giving kids too much independence and too little, overprotection and tough love, smothering and neglect.

Dr. Allen's 10 Tips for Summer Grazing Success

By the time you read this we will be fully into summer 2020. In many parts of the country it has been much cooler than normal well into the month of May. Even here in Mississippi we have had a very pleasant spring. Nighttime temperatures in the 40s and 50s with daytime highs in the 70s. Our cool-season perennials and annuals have persisted far longer than in most years. In the South we are full bore into our 2020 grazing season. Many of you in the northern states are just getting started. Regardless of when your grazing season begins, here are my top 10 tips for grazing success in 2020.

Tip # 1: Do not start spring grazing too early.

After the winter, most people get very anxious to get their livestock turned onto pasture. They see just a green tinge out there and get the itch to initiate grazing. But grazing young, tender growth can set back your entire grazing season and limit total biomass production significantly. Always be prepared to feed or stockpile graze just a little longer into the spring so you have adequate growth before turning the livestock out. That means perennial pastures with at least eight inches of growth.

If you must graze too early, then do what I call a "flash" or "tickle" graze where you move the livestock rapidly through the pastures. But do NOT let them take more than 30% of the total forage biomass on this flash graze. Limiting forage to less than 30% of total biomass will stimulate soil biology and jump start forage growth.

Tip #2: Hope for the Best. Prepare for the Worst.

We grazers tend to be perennial optimists and believe that each year will be better than the last. Sometimes that is the case, but often it is not. When planning your grazing for the year, prepare your grazing plan as if you will experience challenging conditions. Depending on where you are located, that could mean your summer is drier than normal, wetter than normal, hotter or cooler than normal. If any of these events were to happen, how would that impact the way you graze and the number of head you graze?

Read more [here](#).

Coronavirus Outbreaks Climb At U.S. Meatpacking Plants Despite Protections, Trump Order

(From USA Today)

Coronavirus outbreaks at U.S. meatpacking plants continue to soar as the beleaguered industry ramps up production, scales back plant closures and tries to return to normal in the weeks after President Donald Trump declared it an essential operation.

Trump's April 28th executive order followed the industry's dire warnings of meat shortages and invoked the Defense Production Act to compel slaughterhouses and processing plants to remain open.

The order had a chilling effect on the steady drumbeat of closures that had come to symbolize the crisis throughout April and early May. Nearly three dozen coronavirus-affected plants temporarily shuttered in the month leading up to Trump's executive order. In the five weeks since then, just 13 have closed, according to tracking from the Midwest Center for Investigative Reporting.

Meat production, which had briefly tanked, quickly rebounded after the order to near pre-coronavirus levels and quelled consumer fears of pork, beef and poultry shortages. But the number of coronavirus cases tied to meatpacking plants has more than doubled since then, topping 20,400 infections across 216 plants in 33 states, according to tracking from USA TODAY and the Midwest Center for Investigative Reporting.

At least 74 people have died.

That's despite widespread implementation of protective measures like temperature checks, plastic barriers and social distancing meant to curb the virus' spread inside the

plants. Some of the recent outbreaks happened at facilities that had taken such steps.

Read more [here](#).

Demand for Organic Rises to \$50 Billion/yr.

The annual marketplace survey released this week by the Organic Trade Association reported that demand for organic products rose 4.6 percent last year, surpassing the \$50 billion market for the first time. Although the year-over-year sales growth was below the ten-year average, the increase was double the demand growth for conventional products.

The OTA survey this year also included information on consumer trends being affected by the COVID-19 pandemic. The organization conducted an online consumer poll of 3,188 likely organic shoppers Tuesday, April 28—Wednesday, May 6, 2020.

The association reported that five key dynamics emerged:

1. In the immediacy, organic is more important than ever.
More than 90% of respondents indicated that, in their current food shopping, organic is more important than ever. This bears out in accounts from large and small organic brands, as well as reporting from OPN & Category partners, which noted a 25.8% volume increase in organic produce sales in March, compared with volumes seen in March 2019.
2. Organic shoppers are prioritizing produce, dairy and meats in their purchases.
With less time spent in the grocery store, and less selection on the shelves, an overwhelming majority told us they prioritize organic when purchasing produce (93%). Still, animal-based foods were top of mind for many, with 46% indicating choosing organic dairy was important, and 39% expressing a preference for organic meat.
3. Willing to walk on the wild side.
Moving out of the initial months of basics buying, within their organic purchases, 82% of shoppers told us they are still open to experimenting with new products or brands. That's great news for organic entrepreneurs and existing brands alike. And it makes sense; with most restaurants, sporting events and other public spaces shuttered for the time being, trying a new product is one way to add some variety to the days.
4. It's a complicated time (to shop for groceries).
We asked organic shoppers to give us one word that described their priority for food shopping at this time. Naturally, they mentioned organic, but they also cited health and safety, anxiety and availability. They talked about food delivery, but also mentioned their favorite stores. They reported wearing masks and being hopeful. In short, they painted a pretty good picture of what it's like to shop for groceries in this moment.
5. Current changes will have lasting impact.
When asked how they anticipate their organic shopping habits to evolve over the coming 3–6 months, 56% of shoppers indicated that the changes they have experienced (including home cooking, and simplified ways of eating) will become lasting habits. As shoppers continue to prioritize health & wellness and proactive selfcare through the pandemic, we expect to see continued growth—not just around the perimeter of the store, but within also within grocery, supplements, and pet care.

Farm Bureau Makes Appeal To Senate For Next Aid Package *(From AgriPulse)*

The American Farm Bureau Federation on Wednesday sent the Senate a wish list for the next coronavirus relief bill that includes a significant new round of aid to farmers as well as assistance for rural broadband and health care providers.

The group also calls on Congress to provide farms and other businesses protection from pandemic-related lawsuits. Business liability protection is a priority issue for Senate

Majority Leader Mitch McConnell, R-Ky. The Senate is not expected to take up the next aid bill until July.

In a [4 1/2-page letter](#) to McConnell, Democratic Leader Charles Schumer, D-N.Y., and leaders of the Senate Agriculture Committee, AFBF President Zippy Duvall (shown above) said the “economic losses across the U.S. agriculture sector are broad-based, directly impacting farmers and ranchers and their supply chain partners – from input providers to end users.

"Producers have witnessed their markets shrink overnight or even disappear, while supply chains have been stretched to the limit in response to the pandemic. “

The list of requests includes a previous proposal by AFBF to increase USDA’s spending authority under the Commodity Credit Corp. to \$68 billion, up from the current limit of \$30 billion.

The group seeks some measures [included in the \\$3 trillion, House-passed HEROES Act](#), including direct payments for losses after April 15 as well as assistance for biofuel producers. The letter also proposes providing aid to independent and contract poultry producers, who are not eligible for the \$16 billion in Coronavirus Food Assistance Program payments currently being distributed by USDA.

National Team Studying Pandemic’s Effect On Local Food Systems

(From University of Kentucky)

U.S. Department of Agriculture’s Agricultural Marketing Services Division is partnering with the University of Kentucky, Colorado State University and Penn State University on a \$1 million cooperative research agreement to conduct a national study on the COVID-19 pandemic’s effects on local food systems.

Co-principal investigators Lilian Brislen and Tim Woods of the UK [College of Agriculture, Food and Environment](#) will partner with the USDA to lead the team of researchers. Also included in the study are 16 trade association partner organizations from around the country that represent various sectors of the food industry.

The study seeks to answer how sectors of local and regional food systems are responding to COVID-19, what successful adaptations have been implemented, what obstacles the various arms of local food systems have encountered and the economic and value-chain impacts.

The closure of schools, universities and restaurants due to safety measures enacted to slow the spread of COVID-19 has taken a considerable toll on local and regional food markets. The National Sustainable Agriculture Coalition estimates a loss in farmers markets’ annual sales of 10% to 25%, a 10% loss in farm-to-school sales, and 20% loss in food hubs and restaurant sales due to the coronavirus. Based on the USDA Agricultural Marketing Services’ Local Food Impact calculator, this would lead to an estimated loss of \$632 million to \$1.18 billion to local economies.

Until now, a national platform to bring resources together for local and regional food systems stakeholders has been lacking. The yearlong study will create such a platform by fostering cross-sector collaboration, conducting marketplace assessments and capturing production and marketing strategies and innovations. The resulting information will be posted online in the form of webinars, guides, fact sheets, case studies and resources to help producers have a voice in shaping future USDA response programs.

Read more [here](#).

Shutdowns And Slowdowns Spur Closer Look At Meat Processing Capacity

(From AgriPulse)

A turbulent couple of months for meatpackers and their employees has placed a fresh focus on the industry's capacity to process the chicken, pork and beef on American dinner plates.

While factors unique to each meat category prevent a one-size-fits-all solution, the conditions brought to light by COVID-19 have served to amplify existing issues in the processing industry. Where processing capacity expansion was being considered before, it's now sorely needed; where inventory was needed to catch up to capacity before, it's now a race to build herds up to the kind of quantity to keep plants humming.

The drop in USDA's estimated slaughter numbers is not as pronounced now as was several weeks ago, when plants were forced to close as COVID-19 hit their workforce.

At one point, experts estimated protein processing was operating about 40% short of maximum capacity. In recent days, USDA's [daily livestock slaughter figures](#) show a loss of closer to 10% to 15% of capacity as plants come back online. On Monday, USDA estimated the nation's daily beef slaughter at 110,000, about 90% of the 122,000 head slaughtered on the same day a year ago. The pork sector offers a similar story; Monday's estimated slaughter was 403,000, about 85% of the 465,000 slaughtered the previous year. The sheep industry is a little further behind, harvesting 8,000 head compared to the previous year's 10,000.

But as facilities open their doors and turn on the complex machinery needed to make a modern-day packing plant work, it's anyone's guess how long it will take to achieve the kinds of output measured just a few months ago.

"The popular view of the marketplace has been that we could get to 85% to 90% of slaughter, and beyond that, with these changes in the spacing requirements, it's going to be a tough go from there," Don Close, a senior animal protein analyst with Rabo AgriFinance, tells Agri-Pulse. But he also sees some reason for optimism that the numbers could creep a little higher.

"Those processors, and it doesn't matter the species, what they are absolute masters of is driving efficiency into a system," he added. "I think as they get ramped up with staff, they see what their obstacles are for product flow and human flow, they're going to work that problem out."

According to Close, "the argument was already in place that (the beef industry) probably needed more" slaughter capacity, something the COVID-19 pandemic further emphasized. But the virus has also led to calls for a reshaping of the very sector that supplies the nation's beef and pork.

USDA Expands Farmers.Gov Features To Help Manage Conservation Activities

(From USDA)

New self-service features on farmers.gov will help farmers and ranchers manage their conservation activities online and request assistance from the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS).

"These conservation features join a number of others already available through farmers.gov, including the ability to view farm loan information," said Bill Northey, USDA's Under Secretary for Farm Production and Conservation. "As more content and capabilities are added, farmers.gov is quickly becoming the online hub for producers to find resources, submit applications and assistance requests and make connections. Now, amid this pandemic, we recognize the importance of online options for producers to manage their USDA business."

Producers can access these conservation features by desktop computer, tablet or phone. They can now:

- View, download and e-sign documents;
- Request conservation assistance;

- Reference technical terms and submit questions;
- Access information on current and past conservation practices; and
- View detailed information on all previous and ongoing contracts, including the amount of planned and received cost-share assistance.

The new conservation features enhance the request process with a customer-friendly unified mapping tool that allows farmers to locate areas of interest in minutes, with high-resolution aerial imagery and multi-layered display functionality.

The new features include the most popular functionalities from NRCS's Conservation Client Gateway (CCG) while providing enhanced functionality and an improved user experience. CCG is the NRCS portal for producers, but now these functionalities are being moved to farmers.gov to give producers one place to do business with NRCS, Farm Service Agency and other USDA agencies.

Read more [here](#).

NCBA Applauds Introduction Of Emergency Grazing Legislation

(From morningagclips.com)

National Cattlemen's Beef Association (NCBA) today applauded the introduction of the bipartisan, bicameral PASTURE (Pandemic Authority Suitable To Utilize Reserve Easements) Act of 2020 by U.S. Representatives Roger Marshall (R – 1st Dist., Kansas) and Angie Craig (D – 2nd Dist., MN). Companion legislation was introduced in the Senate by Sens. John Thune (R-SD) and Tina Smith (D-MN).

"Yesterday's introduction of the bipartisan, bicameral PASTURE Act is a welcome step toward providing grazing flexibility to livestock producers during the COVID-19 pandemic," said NCBA Vice President of Government Affairs Ethan Lane. "As farmers and ranchers are keeping and feeding livestock for longer periods of time, Congress must ensure that producers do not face a forage shortage. Emergency haying and grazing of Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) acreage is a relied upon practice for livestock and forage management. The PASTURE Act gives USDA the ability to open CRP acreage for emergency haying and grazing during the COVID-19 pandemic.

"On May 15, 2020, NCBA and 35 of its state affiliates sent a letter to Congress urging action on this issue. NCBA looks forward to continued work with both Republicans and Democrats to ensure that cattle producers receive much-needed flexibility during this unprecedented time."

The letter calls for opening acreage enrolled in the Conservation Reserve Program for emergency haying and grazing, which would help producers who have had to keep livestock on grass longer than normal because of slowdowns in meat processing plants, the group says.



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