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Weekly Update



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303-292-2833

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NBA Weekly Update for April 23, 2021

The Weekly Update is a service designed to provide National Bison Association members with news and information affecting bison production and marketing. Many items in the Weekly Update are reprinted from outside sources. The content of those articles does not necessarily reflect the policy position of the National Bison Association. The articles are reproduced here only as a means to keep our membership informed as much as possible of all information and opinions relating to bison that is circulating publicly.

Mexico Expands Market Access to Include Bison Offal

Access to the Mexican market expanded for U.S. bison marketers this week, as Mexico agreed to USDA's request to add a broad slate of offal items to the list of bison products eligible for export to that country.

The items added to the USDA's list of products eligible for export this week include lips, diaphragm, cheek meat, feet, tail, tongue, reticulum, rumen, omasum, abomasum, heart, kidney, liver, thymus, pancreas, and bladder. Intestines were included because of transmissible spongiform encephalopathy (TSE) trade restrictions.

Mexico first opened their markets for U.S. bison meat exports in 2019.

“The expanded agreement is great news for our business, because of the strong demand for offal among consumers in Mexico. This opens the doors for helping our marketers expand their carcass utilization,” said Dave Carter, NBA executive director.

“USDA’s Foreign Agricultural Service worked hard to open the Mexican market for bison meat in 2019. Then, at our request, FAS worked with their counterparts in Mexico to expand that agreement to include offal products. In the meantime, the USDA office in Mexico City has been working with us to promote bison meat to the Mexican consumers,” Carter added.

A Paycheck for Fighting Climate Change

(Earth Day Blog by Dave Carter)

Years ago, farmers in the European Union coined the term “multifunctional” to describe agriculture’s role in society.

As one French farmer explained to me at the time, “We produce so much more than simply food and fiber commodities. We protect healthy soils and watershed, provide wildlife habitat, and create the open spaces that the public enjoys. Why do we only get paid for producing food?”

I thought about this a couple of weeks ago as I listed to an array of political leaders participate in the three-day webinar hosted by a Washington D.C.-based agricultural news service.

The overriding theme of the seminar was the role of agriculture in addressing the new national policy focus on climate change. That makes many bison producers nervous because it conjures up images of a spate of new regulations.

The lawmakers on both sides of the aisle, however, spent little time talking about regulations. Instead, the conversations focused on potential financial incentives to reward producers who are capturing and sequestering carbon. Encouragingly, several speakers mentioned the importance of rewarding the “early adopters;” producers who have sequestered carbon for years.

That certainly describes many bison ranches.

Also encouraging is the emergence of market-based initiatives to purchase carbon credits from ranchers and farmers sequestering carbon. One NBA member-ranch just finalized a contract with a company that will document their carbon sequestration, and then purchase credits that companies will buy to help offset their carbon footprint. Several airlines are among the customers purchasing those credits.

Some of the public policy initiatives discussed during the Washington D.C. seminar focused on expanding the value of those credits.

We’ve long known that the grassland ecosystems carefully nurtured by bison capture carbon from the atmosphere and lock it into the soil. The NBA’s new Conservation Management Plan program provides recognition for bison ranchers who utilize practices to maximize that ecological benefit.

It’s rewarding to know that those ranchers may soon be able to reap financial rewards for their hard work.

On Earth Day 2021, a so-called expert is likely jetting into a major city to present a speech on livestock’s supposed contribution to global warming. It’s a bit ironic to know that the carbon footprint of their jetliner may be offset by a herd of bison quietly grazing on a pasture of newly greening spring grass.

Bull Prices Lower, Heifer Prices Higher in Latest Market Report

Wholesale prices for dressed young bull carcasses dropped sharply in March, but dressed heifer carcasses brought higher prices, according to the latest USDA wholesale market price report issued by USDA's Grain and Livestock Market Reporting Service this month.

Dressed young bulls brought an average of \$376.12/cwt. in April, which was \$15.01/cwt. lower than the previous month and \$31.97/cwt below the prices paid in March 2020. But dressed heifer carcasses brought \$376.24/cwt in March, which was \$12.55/cwt. Above February's average prices, but still \$27.66/cwt below the prices paid in March 2020.

According to USDA's National Agricultural Statistics Service, 16,071 bison have been processed through USDA-inspected facilities to date this year, which is 1,033 more than the equivalent time last year, and the highest year-to-date total through March on record.

See the full report [here](#).

2020 Weaned Calf Crop Only Slightly Smaller than Previous Years

The 2020 crop of bison calves is two percent lower than in 2018, but higher than the 2019 calf crop according to a report released last week by USDA's Grain and Livestock Market Reporting Service.

Weaned Calves *				
	Bulls		Bulls	
	under 400 lbs	over 400 lbs	under 400 lbs	over 400 lbs
2020	2864	5972		
2019	2835	5796		
2018	3469	5653		
	Heifers		Heifers	
	under 400 lbs	over 400 lbs	under 400 lbs	over 400 lbs
2020	4162	4679		
2019	4015	4479		
2018	5157	3494		

The annual report is compiled from weaning numbers provided by more than 25 of the largest bison ranches in the United States. According to the latest report, those ranchers weaned 17,477 calves from their 2020 crop, compared to 17,143 last year, and 17,773 in 2018. However, the animals weaned this year tended to be lighter than in each of the previous two years.

"This report is very helpful because it provides information that can help everyone in the bison business plan for what is coming down the road for the meat market in the coming year or two," said Dave Carter, NBA executive director. "We appreciate the willingness of ranchers to participate in this report, and for the USDA's work in compiling it."

USDA Revises Technical Requirements for Next Section 32 Purchase

Following a meeting last week between the National Bison Association Commercial Marketers' Committee and officials at USDA's Commodity Procurement Program, the agency's Agricultural marketing system today issued some revised requirements for the Quality Assessment Division's (QAS) oversight of the production of ground bison to be used in the Section 32 purchase program.

AMS is expected to issue a formal solicitation for the second round of Section 32 bison meat purchases in the coming weeks. The agency has revised the production requirements for the upcoming round in an effort to position bison meat as a more readily available option for the federal school lunch program and other nutrition programs.

However, NBA's commercial marketers last week noted that some of the specifications that are required for beef vendors are unworkable in the bison sector. AMS officials agreed to consider revisions that will better meet the ability of bison processors to produce product for federal food programs.

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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Bison Herd's First Baby Of 2021 Is Here

(From Mankato Free Press)

MANKATO — Minneopa State Park's herd has a baby bison (da, da, da, dah) and that cute calf's popularity may rival that of a song about a little shark that went viral a few years ago.

"There's tons of curiosity about the first calf to be born this year," said Craig Beckman, Minneopa's manager.

"For the yearlings, it's the first time they ever seen a calf."

Mom has her hooves full controlling the noses of other females in the herd that want to sniff and nuzzle the baby, he said.

Bison cows usually give birth next month, but there have been April surprises for park staff.

Beckman first spotted 2021's first baby when he drove the park's bison road early Friday. "Its legs were still pretty wobbly when I first saw it."

Park staff who checked the herd Wednesday afternoon still saw just one calf among the herd of about 30 bison.

An estimated dozen more babies are expected this spring.

Beckman advises park visitors on the lookout for newborns to use extra caution when they are near the huge animals' turf this spring. Bison, especially first-time mothers, are "a little more edgy and a little more protective" than usual of the herd's youngest members.

Read [more](#).

Gov. Gianforte Announces Settlement Agreement Ending FWP Bison Plan

(From Tri-State Livestock Journal)

HELENA, Mont. – Governor Greg Gianforte today announced a settlement agreement that ends litigation between the Montana Department of Fish, Wildlife & Parks (FWP) and United Property Owners of Montana (UPOM).

"Under the previous administration, FWP didn't do right by farmers, ranchers, and private property owners. In its effort to spread bison across parts of Montana, FWP didn't do enough to account for the impacts to local communities and relied on outdated data," Gov. Gianforte said. "This settlement agreement protects our livestock producers and rural lands and reaffirms the state can and should do better going forward."

“FWP is committed to engaging communities and stakeholders on the impacts of decisions like this. We’re grateful to have this lawsuit behind us,” said Hank Worsch, director of FWP.

In January 2020, FWP issued a Final Programmatic Environmental Impact Statement for Bison Conservation and Management in Montana (EIS) and an associated Record of Decision. In March 2020, UPOM filed suit against FWP alleging the agency violated MEPA, MAPA, and environmental impact review requirements during the EIS process.

In the settlement agreement, FWP and UPOM agree the Final EIS failed to adequately consider disease transmission between bison, livestock, and other wildlife, there was an inadequate public comment opportunity, and the Final EIS relied on outdated data, among other things.

Read [more](#).

Yellowstone bison carcass disposal breeds unique partnerships

(From the Billings Gazette)

A shared interest in bison migrating into the Gardiner Basin has created a unique partnership.

A group of bison carcass recyclers, known as the [Buffalo Bridge Project](#), has garnered the attention of the InterAgency Bison Management Plan. IBMP is composed of federal, state and tribal officials who work together on Yellowstone bison management issues and assisted in some of their tasks by members of conservation groups.

Since 2013, Buffalo Bridge has provided a unique service in the Gardiner Basin by scavenging bison hides, hooves, heads, ribcages, fat and internal organs from bison that hunters kill. From the scraps the members make bison jerky and bone broth. They also can internal organs like heart meat and make clothing and decorations.

“Hunters can’t fathom that a bunch of white people are coming out with sleds and don’t want anything,” project member Epona told the Gazette in a 2016 story. “Hunters expect us to want money. That’s part of what makes this so special, that we’re just friends having fun.”

The winter of 2019-2020, Buffalo Bridge Project didn’t visit the Gardiner Basin after losing its campsite. This winter the Custer Gallatin National Forest offered to let the group stay at a Forest Service day-use site for four weeks.

Read [more](#).

Tribes, Conservation Groups Urge Governor to Veto Bills Targeting Bison Restoration

(From the Bozeman Chronicle)

Tribal leaders and conservation advocates on Wednesday sent a letter to Montana’s governor urging him to veto two bills they say would make it harder to restore wild bison in the state.

The letter was emailed to Montana Gov. Greg Gianforte a day after he announced Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks would be tossing its Bison Conservation and Management Plan in a settlement with a property rights group.

The management plan, which had been in the works for nearly a decade, offered tribes and nonprofits a vehicle for proposing bison restoration projects in the state, according to Chamois Andersen with Defenders of Wildlife.

Last January, the United Property Owners of Montana sued FWP over the plan, claiming

officials neglected to adequately analyze the impacts of disease transmission between bison and livestock.

Montana's livestock industry fears allowing more bison to roam freely could lead to brucellosis transmission. A transmission could cost the state its brucellosis class-free status, leading to significant economic consequences.

Brucellosis is a bacterial disease that can cause abortion in livestock or birth of weak offspring. Though many bison have been exposed to it, it's never been transmitted from bison to livestock in the wild. Wild elk have transmitted the disease to livestock.

"This is a huge win for property owners in Montana. We've successfully blocked the introduction of free-roaming bison for at least the next decade," said UPOM Policy Director Chuck Denowh in a news release. "This is a major setback for the American Prairie Reserve and their plan to impose wild bison on their neighbors and on our public land."

A day after the management plan was scrapped, representatives of the Blackfeet Nation, Fort Belknap Indian Community, Fort Peck Assiniboine and Sioux Tribes and InterTribal Buffalo Council signed and sent a letter to Gianforte calling for a veto on House Bills 318 and 302.

Read more [here](#).

Extinct for Millennia, Bison Back in Spain to Fight Climate Change

(From Voice of America)

MADRID - The hulking, horned bison has long been an iconic symbol for people from the United States to eastern Europe.

They were worshipped as deities by the Native Americans and for the Polish, they are the most important animal after the double-headed eagle which adorns the national flag. Cave paintings in Spain show they were an essential part of life on the Iberian Peninsula about 1.2 million years ago.

After being hunted nearly to extinction in the United States and Europe alike, the bison is undergoing a resurgence in terms of numbers.

Conservationists now believe that far from being a historical symbol, the bison may play a role in tackling some of the side-effects of the biggest problem facing mankind in the future— climate change.

Bison are herbivores that naturally feed on the undergrowth which fuels forest fires, a natural hazard as the world heats up.

Rising temperatures and rural depopulation among factors which are driving a rise in forest fires.

In Spain, wildfires have destroyed about 741,000 hectares of forest over the past ten years, according to government estimates.

Read [more](#).

USDA Seeks Comments on Food System Supply Chains

Agriculture Secretary Tom Vilsack this week announced that the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) is seeking comments on a Department-wide effort to improve and reimagine the supply chains for the production, processing and distribution of agricultural commodities and food products.

USDA is taking this action in response to [Executive Order 14017, America's Supply Chains](#), signed by President Biden on Feb. 24, 2021. The request for comments is published today in the [Federal Register](#) and the comment period will close on May 21, 2021.

The comments received will help USDA assess the critical factors, risks, and strategies needed to support resilient, diverse, and secure supply chains and ensure U.S. economic prosperity, national security, and nutrition security for all Americans. Such supply chains are needed to address conditions that can reduce critical processing and infrastructure capacity and the availability and integrity of critical goods, products, and services. Identifying food system supply chain-bottlenecks and vulnerabilities also may provide valuable insights into the competitive and fair markets landscape, effects on local and regional producers and processors, and equitable access to food and economic opportunity across diverse communities. USDA will use the comments to prepare a report required by Executive Order 14017.

Meatpacking Plants Accounted for 334,000 U.S. COVID Cases: Study

(From U.S. News & World Report)

Meatpacking plants were the source of an estimated 334,000 COVID-19 cases in the United States, according to a new study. It puts the economic toll stemming from those cases at \$11.2 billion.

And study author Tina Saitone, a livestock and rangeland economics cooperative extension specialist at the University of California, Davis, said those numbers are conservative.

The research included U.S. counties with large meatpacking plants that produced more than 10 million pounds a month. The investigators looked at infections within 150 days after the first documented COVID case in each county.

Beef- and pork-processing plants more than doubled infection rates in counties where they were located, while chicken-processing plants increased rates by 20%, according to the study.

Read [more](#).

Wyoming Collects 1,130 Elk Samples for Brucellosis Research

(From GoHunt.com)

Hunters helped further the Wyoming Game and Fish Department's (WGFD) brucellosis monitoring by submitting 1,130 blood samples during the 2020 elk hunting season. Samples were collected from bulls, cows and calves, Sweetwater Now reports.

Hunters who submitted a sample were entered into a raffle for a variety of gear and other prizes.

"We're glad to encourage hunters to submit blood samples to help Game and Fish monitor brucellosis in Wyoming," said Eric Maichak, WGFD disease biologist. "Thank you to our generous sponsors who provided the prizes and to each hunter who submitted a sample. You truly make a difference for the health of wildlife."

According to Sweetwater Now, brucellosis has been found in elk and bison within the Yellowstone region in Wyoming, Idaho and Montana. While there is a state/federal eradication program that has decreased the prevalence of the disease in cattle, it continues to be a threat to both elk and bison.

Read [more](#).

Third COVID relief bill helps veterinarians

(From JAVMA News)

The \$1.9 trillion COVID-19 relief package signed into law March 11 includes several AVMA-backed provisions critical to supporting veterinary professionals and preventing another pandemic.

These include tax benefits for qualified educational loan borrowers, support for small-business programs such as the Paycheck Protection Program, and funding for SARS-CoV-2 monitoring and surveillance.

The relief package, known as the American Rescue Plan Act, temporarily provides tax-free treatment of forgiven debt for qualified educational loans discharged Dec. 31, 2020, through Jan. 1, 2026. Qualified loans generally include those guaranteed by the federal government.

Read [more](#).

Senate Ag Moves Stabenow-Braun Climate Bill

(From AgriPulse)

The Senate Agriculture Committee has cleared the way for floor consideration of the [Growing Climate Solutions Act](#), which would help farmers, ranchers and foresters take part in voluntary carbon markets.

The bill, S. 1251, passed the committee by voice vote Thursday without opposition. Notably, it now has 42 co-sponsors, evenly split between Democrats and Republicans.

“This brings us one step closer to providing more opportunities for farmers and foresters to lead in addressing the climate crisis and also benefit from new streams of income,” said committee Chairwoman Debbie Stabenow, D-Mich.

“This collaboration is a continuation of the long-standing tradition that is expected of the Senate Agriculture Committee to develop practical, bipartisan policy,” Arkansas Sen. John Boozman, the panel's top Republican, said.

Sen. Mike Braun, R-Ind., who worked with Stabenow to gain bipartisan support for the bill, said for conservatives, “this is a way to say we want to be engaged and we want to be doing something” on climate.

The action came on Earth Day, as President Joe Biden [announced](#) a goal of cutting the country's greenhouse gas emissions in half by 2030.

The bill was joined today on the House side by a bill with the same name, introduced by Reps. Abigail Spanberger, D-Va., and Don Bacon, R-Neb. Their Growing Climate Solutions Act “would establish a Greenhouse Gas Technical Assistance Provider and Third-Party Verifier Certification Program through which USDA would be able to provide transparency, legitimacy, and informal endorsement of third-party verifiers and technical service providers that help private landowners generate carbon credits through a variety of agriculture and forestry related practices,” according to a [press release](#) that also noted the bill has 22 co-sponsors, including nine Republicans.

States Welcome New Wave of Small Processing Plants

(From Meatingplace.com)

From Wyoming to North Carolina, smaller processing plants are enjoying a renaissance in states across the country.

The seeds for expanding the regional businesses were planted during the COVID-19 pandemic, when outbreaks of the virus shut down large processing facilities around the

country for weeks at a time, exposing a need for more options for local producers. The latest small processor operations include:

- In Wyoming, 307 Processing and Sausage gained state approval to operate effective April 1, according to a [report](#) from the Big Horn Radio Network. The plant, which is already taking orders from restaurants, hotels, schools and grocery stores, is Wyoming's 10th state-inspected meat plant and the third facility in the Bighorn Basin, the report said.
- In North Carolina, Watauga Butchery opened last year in Watauga County offering custom butchering and packing services for beef producers, and has now expanded to pork and lamb, according to a [report](#) in the Caldwell Journal. The idea for the facility, which is USDA-inspected, was developed after COVID-19 plant shutdowns pushed lead times at slaughterhouses in the area from four weeks to over a year, the report said. The owners plan to offer value-added products, including burger patties and sausages.
- In Massachusetts, Westport's Meatworks, one of only two USDA-inspected processing facilities in the state, is booked until 2022, The Herald News [reported](#). In response to the backlog, two state lawmakers are sponsoring a bill aimed at helping more custom slaughterhouses become federally inspected.

Bonnie Tapped to Lead USDA Farm Programs

(From AgriPulse)

Robert Bonnie, a proponent of ag carbon markets who has been serving as Agriculture Secretary Tom Vilsack's chief climate adviser, will be nominated by President Joe Biden to oversee farm and conservation programs at USDA as well as federal crop insurance. As USDA's undersecretary for farm production and conservation programs, Bonnie would be positioned to shape much of the Biden administration's climate policy when it comes to agriculture, including the possible use of the Commodity Credit Corp. to establish a carbon bank that could put a floor under carbon credit prices.

The farm production and conservation mission area include the Farm Service Agency, which manages commodity programs and the Conservation Reserve Program; the Risk Management Agency, which handles crop insurance, and the Natural Resources Conservation Service, which administers conservation programs other than CRP, for which the agency provides some technical assistance.

Bonnie was the co-chair of the Biden administration's transition team for USDA and has previously spent time as the vice president for land conservation at the Environmental Defense Fund.

If confirmed by the Senate, Bonnie would be overseeing NRCS for the second time. During his tenure as undersecretary for natural resources and environment during the Obama administration, Bonnie oversaw that agency as well as the U.S. Forest Service. A USDA reorganization under the Trump administration shifted NRCS to the FPAC mission area, aligning it with FSA and RMA.

Bonnie has been a champion for using USDA funds to invest in carbon sequestration efforts of American farms, ranches, and forests. As a member of Duke University's Nicholas Institute for Environmental Policy Solutions, Bonnie co-authored the [Climate21 report](#), a set of climate change mitigation recommendations for USDA that encouraged the department to "establish a carbon bank through administrative action by using existing authorities under the Commodity Credit Corp., which has broad authorization to support, stabilize and protect farm income and prices and to support conservation, and which has been used in similarly innovative ways in the past."

New Partnership to Support Sustainable Grazing Practices

(From AgriPulse)

Cargill, the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation and food service giant Sysco

have [announced](#) a partnership to speed the implementation of sustainable grazing practices over the next five years on a million acres of the southern Great Plains, a region responsible for 30% of U.S. beef production.

NFWF grants awarded through the southern Plains project will scale up implementation of sustainable grazing practices, such as rotational grazing and control of invasive vegetation. The money will go to non-profit conservation groups, government agencies and rancher-led collaboratives that offer the best options for improving grasslands at the landscape scale.

Regan Pledges Not to Return to Obama-Era WOTUS Definition

(From AgriPulse)

Environmental Protection Agency Administrator Michael Regan told Congress Wednesday he does not intend to go back to the Obama administration's definition of Waters of the U.S.

During a House Appropriations Subcommittee budget hearing, Republican Congressmen Mike Simpson of Idaho and Chris Stewart of Utah pressed Regan on his planned WOTUS actions as administrator.

"We don't have any intention of going back to the original Obama Waters of the U.S. verbatim," Regan told the subcommittee.

But he noted the agency does not necessarily agree with everything in the Trump administration's version as well.

"We've learned lessons from both, we've seen complexities in both, and we've determined both rules necessarily did not listen to the will of the people," he said.

Regan then echoed comments made in his confirmation [hearing](#) saying, he is beginning a stakeholder engagement process involving the ag community, American Farm Bureau Federation, ag CEOs, and the environmental community.

He pledged the agency will chart a path forward that is "inclusive" and "forward-leaning." Stewart thought that was a fair approach.

Vilsack: No Intent Of 'Land Grab' In Biden's 30x30 Goal

(From AgriPulse)

Agriculture Secretary Tom Vilsack denied Thursday that President Joe Biden's goal of conserving 30% of the nation's land by 2030 is a "land grab" but is instead intended to protect "private, working lands" through voluntary programs.

Vilsack said the Department of Agriculture is soliciting input from commodity groups and others on how best to meet the goal, which was laid out in an executive order in January. That input "will give us the ability to understand how best to structure this, but I can assure you this: There's no intention to have a land grab," Vilsack told reporters.

"There's no intention to take something away from folks."

The 30x30 goal, which is part of Biden's strategy for reducing greenhouse gas emissions, has raised alarms in many parts of the country.

[Biden on Thursday announced](#) that the United States was committing to reducing its greenhouse gas emissions by at least 50% by 2030 from 2005 levels. Biden is not setting specific reduction goals for agriculture or other sectors of the economy.

But Vilsack said that USDA's decision [to try to add 4 million acres to the Conservation Reserve Program](#) was in line with the goal. To coax landowners to enroll acreage in CRP,

USDA is increasing payment rates and other financial incentives. The department also is making a one-time 10% “inflationary” increase in payment rates for all contracts.

The 30x30 goal is “really designed to figure out creative and innovative ways to encourage folks to participate in (conservation efforts), as many farmers and ranchers are already doing, and may very well be inclined to do more if the right set of incentives are in place,” Vilsack said.



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