



National Bison Association

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Weekly Update from the National Bison Association

A news and update service **exclusively** for members of the National Bison Association.
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USDA to Initiate Petition to Open Japan, Mexico for Bison

The U.S. Department of Agriculture's Foreign Agriculture Service this week agreed to initiate the formal process to open Mexico and Japan for imports of U.S.-produced bison meat.

The agreement came at the request of the National Bison Association. NBA Executive Director met in Washington, D.C. this week with two officials from the FAS to discuss the procedure for opening those markets for U.S. bison.

Opening the Japanese market will likely be a multi-year process that will begin with a formal petition from the USDA. Officials at FAS have initiated contact with the Veterinary Services office at USDA Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service to begin preliminary work on drafting the petition.

FAS filed a petition to reopen Korea for U.S. bison in 2016 and is now responding to questions that the Korean government has posed.

Japan and Korea were both closed to U.S. red meat following an incidence of a U.S. dairy cow invested with bovine spongiform encephalopathy (BSE) in 2003. Both countries have reopened their markets for beef, but not for bison.

Meanwhile, FAS International Trade Specialist Elizabeth Riley has initiated contact with the FAS Post in Mexico City to initiate the process of opening Mexico for imports of U.S. bison meat. That process is not expected to be as lengthy or complex as reopening the Korean and Japanese markets. Mexico already allows the importation of Canadian bison meat into that country.

FAS officials advised that the ongoing NAFTA renegotiations may impact the timing of a formal request to Mexico.

Turnout Good, Interest High at Bison Advantage Workshop

NBA Assistant Director Jim Matheson last week facilitated a Bison Advantage work shop at the Black Hills Stock Show in Rapid City, SD.

Turn out was strong at about 20 attendees with largely new faces attending to learn more about the bison business. Matheson went through a variety of topics that pertain to running a successful bison operation that ranged from foundation herd animal selection to marketing options for the finished product.

Matheson reported that enthusiasm was high in the room. “It’s always great to expose newcomers to our business to not only show them that bison is a highlight in today’s agricultural economy, but also to expose them to buffalo ranchers who are more than willing to share their experience and welcome these folks with open arms”.

Matheson was joined by a handful of seasoned bison producers at the session who shared their perspectives on a variety of topics, from fencing to weaning, which provided the attendees with a very practical producer-friendly learning environment.

WT Herdsmen Compete at Annual Bison Conference/Judging Contest *(From MyHighPlains.com)*

Members of the West Texas A&M University Herdsmen were recognized at the recent National Bison Association’s 23rd annual winter conference and 10th annual Junior Judging Contest in Denver.

Cassidy Wallace of Denton took top honors and a \$1,500 scholarship in individual judging competition, and the Herdsmen team placed second overall in the team judging competition. Wallace, a freshman political science major, earned 226 points to nab the first-place honors and the scholarship provided by the National Buffalo Foundation.

She and her fellow teammates also competed in the team judging competition and earned a total of 668.5 points for second place. Team members included Wallace, Laura Corder, junior agriculture business and economics business major from Amarillo; Madison Looney, freshman agriculture major from Mansfield; and Raul Salado III, junior animal science major from El Paso.

“We have been attending the NBA winter conference for the last nine years to expose the students to producers in the bison industry,” Shawn Burns, WTAMU chief of police and Herdsmen adviser, said. “This gives us a wealth of knowledge related to the species and allows the students the ability to learn from some of the best in the bison business.”

The Herdsmen is a University spirit organization in charge of the care and training of the live mascot. This year’s conference, “Roaming to Success,” offered the team members information ranging from handling techniques to the latest innovations in grassland health.

Read more. <http://www.myhighplains.com/news/wt-herdsmen-compete-at-annual-bison-conferencejudging-contest/957958276>

What Bison In South Dakota Can Teach Us About Fighting Climate Change *(From Vox)*

The Weather Channel recently launched a [fantastic package](#) on the impacts of climate change across the United States, with 50 stories about how rising temperatures will affect all 50 states. One that really stood out was about South Dakota — a part of the country often overlooked for its climate vulnerability — tying together bison herds and a clever tactic for pulling carbon dioxide out of the air.

The piece, by [Pam Wright](#), emphasizes two key points about climate change in the United States that I think often get lost in discussions: 1) While we often tend to focus on dramatic impacts of climate change — higher seas and more intense hurricanes on the coasts — regions like the Great Plains are facing dire economic threats too. And 2) Not all of the solutions for climate change have to do with technology.

Rising temperatures may shrink cattle herds in South Dakota, threatening the state's economy. Average temperatures in South Dakota have already shot up by 2 degrees Fahrenheit since 1900, and the number of triple-digit temperature days is poised to double by 2050, Wright reports. The concern is that these rising temperatures will lead to more severe droughts, which in turn will harm the livestock this state relies on heavily for its economy.

South Dakota has about [five beef cattle](#) for every one of its 865,000 residents, and they're worth almost \$2.8 billion to the state's economy.

And using bison as a proxy for cattle, one study found that every degree Celsius of average temperature rise would cost the livestock industry an additional [\\$1 billion](#) as the market weight of cattle declines.

Projections show that under a business as usual trajectory for greenhouse gas emissions, the region will see average temperature rise by 4.65 degrees Fahrenheit by 2065, which will take a big bite out of the state's cattle industry.

Bison are being harnessed as carbon engineers

While greenhouse gases from transportation and power plants ([rightfully](#)) dominate the discussions about the causes of climate change, agriculture, and, more fundamentally, the way we use land, also produces a lot of emissions.

Read more. <https://www.vox.com/energy-and-environment/2018/2/2/16934232/holistic-grazing-bison-south-dakota-climate-change>

Elk, Bison could Reduce Environmental Impact of Pet Food

(From Petfood Industry)

Elk and bison ranches provide healthy novel proteins for dog and cat food while allowing pet food brands to make sustainability claims because the animals cause less ecological damage than cattle. By using organ meat and by-products from bison and elk, the pet food industry helps to increase the market for the whole animal, further increasing efficiency and sustainability. What's more, elk and bison are still relatively rare in pet foods, so including them as a novel protein can help a brand stand out.

"As more people discover the great taste and nutritional attributes of sustainably raised bison, they want their companion animals to enjoy the experience as well," said Dave Carter of the National Bison Association.

Two decades ago, bison ranchers mostly marketed tenderloins, ribeye and strip steaks, resulting in freezers full of unsold chuck, roasts, trim and co-products, said Carter, but now demand for every part of the animal is growing.

"The demand for bison in pet food is creating strong demand for hearts and livers as well," said Carter.

Likewise, with elk, butchers use everything but the bugle (elks' call), to paraphrase pig farmers who use everything but the squeal.

"Elk's large carcasses yield hundreds of pounds of meat that is highly desired in North America," said Brenda Hartkopf of the Elk Breeders Association. "Hard antler traditionally was used for antler decor but now the dog chew market has taken the elk industry by storm. In addition to its delicious taste, the meat is high in protein and low in both fat and cholesterol."

Some scientists and sustainability advocates have pointed out the pollution and resource use resulting from domesticated livestock, particularly cattle. For example, research published in the Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences concluded that reducing beef consumption, more than any other meat, would mitigate the environmental damage resulting from human diets.

However, North American elk and bison ranchers may have a much smaller negative effect, because the animals evolved in harmony with the American ecosystem. Elk and bison were once widespread throughout what is now the United States, Canada and even northern Mexico, in the case of the bison. Hunting and habitat loss dramatically reduced the range and populations of both species.

"In the 1880s, bison teetered on the brink of extinction, with an estimated 750 remaining in North America," said Carter. "Today, the North American population is estimated a 4100,000 head, with more than 90 percent on farms and ranches."

In the past four decades, efforts by conservationists and others have restored both species to fragments of their former range. Along with reintroduction to the wild, ranchers now raise bison and elk to supply the human and pet food industry with meat.

"The grassland ecosystems of North America (comprising more than 30 percent of the landmass) evolved in concert with bison and other grazing animals," said Carter. "Those grasslands are vital in helping to remove carbon from the atmosphere and sequestering it in the soil. [Bison] ranchers are managing their herds to maintain healthy grasslands, and to build healthy soil."

South Dakota Bison Herds Injured After Winter Wildfires

(From The US News and World Report)

RAPID CITY, S.D. (AP) — None of the bison in Custer State Park and Bear Butte State Park were killed outright by winter wildfires, but some may have to be euthanized because of burns or other injuries.

Custer State Park's Herd Manager Chad Kremer told the Rapid City Journal that no bison herd deaths were reported from the direct flames of the Legion Lake wildfire that burned almost 85 square miles. But he said one cow was euthanized after smoke damage left the animal blind. "We had quite a few with the smoke and heat affecting their eyes, they weren't completely blind, couldn't see definition, just light and dark," he said.

Kremer said other bison had injuries from their outer, thicker coat being burned off and burns on their backside, underbelly, eyelids, muzzle and lips.

He estimated between five and 10 bison may need to be euthanized because of injuries. Kremer's personal herd near the park wasn't able to escape the flames as easily. He said he has lost seven bison to the blaze and he'll know within weeks if up to 10 others have to be euthanized because of their injuries.

The Bear Butte State Park herd was spared from a fire last weekend.

Read more. <https://www.usnews.com/news/best-states/south-dakota/articles/2018-02-08/south-dakota-bison-herds-injured-after-winter-wildfires>

Yellowstone Bison Advocates Sue USDA over Documents Request

(From The Bozeman Daily Chronicle)

A bison activist group is arguing that the federal government is illegally withholding information related to the testing of a birth control drug on Yellowstone bison.

The Buffalo Field Campaign sued the Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service in federal court Wednesday over the group's request for documents related to the agency's GonaCon research project. GonaCon is a drug that makes bison infertile, and the agency was researching its usefulness in limiting the spread of brucellosis from Yellowstone bison.

The group argues that APHIS, a branch of the U.S. Department of Agriculture, has repeatedly missed statutory deadlines for responding to its Freedom of Information Act request and hasn't followed the proper procedure for extending those deadlines. It is asking a federal judge to order APHIS to turn over the documents the group has requested.

Ken Cole, executive director of the Buffalo Field Campaign, said in a press release that their request is meant to shed light on what happened during the GonaCon study. APHIS officials said at a meeting in November 2017 fall that the study was over.

"We are unaware of anyone other than the Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service who has records on the well-being of once wild buffalo held in captivity for the livestock agency's population control experiment," Cole said. "We want to know what is happening to the buffalo in captivity that once roamed free in the Yellowstone ecosystem."

An APHIS spokeswoman declined to comment on the lawsuit.

Read more.

https://www.bozemandailychronicle.com/news/yellowstone_national_park/yellowstone-bison-advocates-sue-usda-over-documents-request/article_12918ce0-3995-5a59-a9c7-eba0637c0394.html

Study Finds Aquaculture and Livestock Feed Conversion Similar

A study published by Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health's Center for a Livable Future in *Environmental Research Letters* found that farmed fish and shrimp convert protein and calories in feed to edible seafood at rates similar to livestock. The study contributes new insights that run contrary to widely held assumptions regarding what is known as feed conversion efficiency.

In this study, researchers found that average protein and calorie retention across nine types of farmed fish and shrimp are lower than chickens and similar to pig and cattle production. They estimate that 19% of protein and 10% of calories in feed for aquatic species are ultimately made available in the human food supply.

"The finding that fed aquatic species are comparable to land-based animals when measuring conversion of protein and calories in feed into animal products upends conventional wisdom," said Jillian Fry, PhD, director of the Public Health and Sustainable Aquaculture Project at the Center for a Livable Future.

"This study provides strong evidence that strategies to address global food security and resource conservation should consider multiple food production efficiency measures."

Read more. <https://www.jhsph.edu/news/news-releases/2018/farmed-seafood-and-livestock-stack-up-differently-using-alternate-feed-efficiency-measure.html>

Wild Birds Prefer Rotationally Grazed Pasture

Practical Farmers of Iowa has published *Monitoring Birds in Rotationally Grazed Pasture, 2017 Update*, a research report on a multi year study showing that rotationally grazed pastures support threatened bird species. Drake University students monitored populations of five species of grassland birds of conservation interest on Bruce Carney's farm in Maxwell, Iowa.

They found that grassland birds were attracted to the rotationally grazed pasture's mix of short and tall vegetation, and the bobolink and grasshopper sparrow even seemed to prefer these pastures over a nearby prairie conservation area. The full six-page report is available online.

Read more. <http://www.practicalfarmers.org/farmer-knowledge/research-reports/2017/monitoring-birds-rotationally-grazed-pasture-2017-update/>

Resource to Aid Conservation Stewardship Program Applicants

The National Sustainable Agriculture Coalition has released its *CSP 2018 Information Alert*, which includes step-by-step guidance and enrollment information for the Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP). USDA's Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS), which administers CSP, plans to enroll 10 million new acres in the program this year.

The cutoff date to apply for 2018 enrollment is March 2, 2018. The Information Alert publication includes details on all changes that were made to CSP as part of its reinvention last year, including new ranking and eligibility tools and expanded options for enhancements and practices. The Information Alert is a 16-page PDF available free online.

Read more. <http://sustainableagriculture.net/blog/csp-2018-information-alert/>

Texas Agricultural Water Conservation Grants

The Texas Water Development Board is accepting applications for grants up to \$150,000 through the Fiscal Year 2018 Agricultural Water Conservation Grants. Grant categories include equipment cost share and technology transfer, demonstrations of innovative and alternative production systems, planning and design for irrigation system improvements, and feasibility study of irrigating with produced water from the oil and gas sector. Eligible applicants are state agencies and political subdivisions.

Applications are due by February 14, 2018.

Read more.

http://www.twdb.texas.gov/about/contract_admin/request/doc/FY18AgGrantsRFA.pdf

Lawmakers Call on Trump to Preserve NAFTA

(From the Hill)

House and Senate lawmakers urged President Trump and his top trade official in Wednesday meetings to complete negotiations of an updated North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA).

Several members of the Senate Finance Committee, who met with Trump at the White House, expressed the importance of the 24-year-old NAFTA pact with Mexico and Canada to the U.S. economy along with their concerns about the U.S.-China trading relationship.

Senate Finance Committee Chairman Orrin Hatch (R-Utah) called the conversation "robust."

"In our meeting, we underscored that preserving NAFTA is vital for the millions of Americans whose jobs depend on trade in North America, and that weakening the agreement would jeopardize American economic growth," Hatch said.

"We committed to working with the president to improve and modernize the agreement," Hatch said.

"We also discussed the mutual desire to confront the challenges China poses to American businesses and workers."

Full story: <http://thehill.com/policy/finance/372821-lawmakers-call-on-trump-to-preserve-nafta>

Net Farm Income Set to Hit Lowest Level Since 2006

(From AgriPulse)

Net farm income for 2018 is projected to hit the lowest level since 2006, according to a report released today from the USDA's Economic Research Service.

The 6.7 percent drop from the latest 2017 forecast, from \$63.8 billion to \$59.5 billion, is due largely to a \$3.5 billion increase in production costs and a \$2.1 billion decrease in government payments.

Net income reached a record \$123.8 billion in 2013, before experiencing a sharp decline and is now forecast to be less than half that figure. Carrie Litkowski, senior economist with ERS, says the numbers now appear to be stabilizing.

"It does, to me, look like a flattening so far," she said during a webcast following the report's release.

The projected 12-year low comes as Congress begins debate on a new five-year farm bill and may provide commodity groups with new evidence for a strengthened safety net. The report predicts year-over-year declines in most commodities, with soybeans the sole crop where increased cash receipts are expected. Still, income from soybeans is projected to decline, despite increased production.

"Cash receipts for all commodities are forecast to fall (in nominal dollars) \$2.0 billion (0.5 percent) in 2018 to \$363.1 billion. Relatively small annual declines are predicted for both animal/animal product (0.3 percent) and crop (0.8 percent) receipts," the report said.

"Forecast declines in receipts for milk and poultry/eggs are expected to more than offset a forecast increase in meat animal receipts. A forecast \$1.7-billion (4.5 percent) increase in soybean receipts will be more than offset by expected declines in receipts for wheat, corn, cotton, fruits/nuts, and vegetables/melons."

Net income from dairy, after an increase in 2017, is expected to return to more normal levels due to lower milk prices. This is expected to hit the Northern Crescent region – from Maine to Minnesota – particularly hard with a 12.4 percent decrease forecast in net cash income.

John Newton, director of market intelligence for the American Farm Bureau Federation, agreed with Litkowski's analysis, saying income levels "certainly seem to be stabilizing to the level prior to 2009 and 2010."

Snacks Increasingly Considered as Meals

(From Wall Street Journal)

Fresh fruit and corn or potato chips are the most popular snacks being incorporated in a larger dinner, appearing 22 percent of the time, according to The NPD Group. Full-on snack dinners range from simple chips and salsa to widely varied lineups that include vegetables, dips, chips, and smoked meats.

The trend follows companies introducing traditional dinner foods in snackable forms, such as macaroni and cheese squares or cheesesteak bites. "We are seeing products that push the limit on what's considered a snack," Beth Bloom, associate director at Mintel, told the *Wall Street Journal*. Snack dinners usually don't require much cooking, which makes them popular among younger consumers who are busy or not confident in their cooking skills, according to the report.