



## **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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**September 16, 2016**

### **NBA Joins Montana Association to Promote Bison at Extension Agents' Conference**

National Bison Association Executive Director Dave Carter joined Montana Bison Association (MtBA) Board Member Craig Denney to urge Cooperative Extension agents from around the country in the effort to recruit new participants to the business of raising and marketing buffalo.

The MtBA and NBA teamed up to host a booth at the National Extension Association of Family and Consumer Sciences conference in Big Sky, MT this week, and to interact with the estimated 700 Extension Agents with a message about the opportunities available in bison ranching and marketing.

The presence at the NEAFCS conference also provided a preview into the venue that will serve as the host facility for the 2017 International Bison Conference in July 2017.

The booth presence at Big Sky was thanks to the NBA's Bison Advantage Promotion Project funded by a grant from the North Central Sustainable Agriculture Research and Education (NCSARE) division of USDA, which aims to educate extension agents about the bison business.

### **Matheson Conducts Indiana Bison Advantage Session**

NBA Assistant Director, Jim Matheson, was in Wolcottville, Indiana today to facilitate the final Bison Advantage Promotion workshop at Cook's Bison Ranch. 55 extension agents, prospective and new bison producers attended the workshop, in which they learned the basics of bison production and marketing.

Hosts Cook's Bison Ranch provided a great classroom to conduct the workshop which included classroom time, a bison luncheon and a tour of the ranch. This is the sixth and final workshop facilitated in the Bison Advantage Promotion Project training series. Other workshops took place in North Dakota, South Dakota, Illinois, Minnesota and Kansas.

The Bison Advantage Promotion Project also supported the development of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition of the Bison Producer Handbook and other crucial learning materials as the NBA continues to educate others about our great business.

## **Wholesale Bison Prices Continue Climb**

Prices paid for slaughter-ready bison continued to edge higher in August, reaching another set of historic highs, according to the monthly wholesale bison price report issued this week by the USDA Livestock and Grain Market News Reporting Service. And, in a rare development, prices for heifer carcasses outstripped the comparable prices for young bull carcasses.

Heifers in August brought an average of \$479.02/cwt., which was a \$35.38/cwt. jump over the previous month, and a \$67.36/cwt increase over August 2015. Young bull carcasses brought an average of \$458.44/Cwt., with was up \$171/cwt. over the previous month and \$34.73/cwt over the previous year. Aged bulls were slightly higher than the previous month, but older cows were slightly lower.

The comparable beef carcass prices in August were \$186.91/cwt. for both steers and heifers.

According to the USDA National Agricultural Statistics Service, 35,490 bison have been processed under federal inspection year-to-date. That is 234 fewer animals than were processed during the previous period in 2015.

Also, young bulls represented 53 percent of the younger animals processed through August 2016. That compares to an average of 62 percent over the past six years.

The USDA monthly price report is available at:  
[https://www.ams.usda.gov/mnreports/nw\\_ls526.txt](https://www.ams.usda.gov/mnreports/nw_ls526.txt)

The NBA Five-Year tracking summary report is available in the members' section at  
[www.bisoncentral.com](http://www.bisoncentral.com).

## **USDA Buys More Ground Bison for Food Distribution Programs**

The USDA last Friday announced that it has awarded a contract to Kiva Sun Foods of Bend, OR for two million pounds of frozen ground bison, at a price of \$8.99/lb. The award was made in response to Solicitation 2000004252 issued on August 4, 2016.

According the award announcement, the ground bison will be delivered to Nampa, ID, and Kansas City, MO between November 1, 2016, and September 30, 2017.

## **Modern Farmer Magazine Touts Bison in Latest Issue**

*Modern Farmer* magazine this week went *All In* on bison this week with a series of articles in both its print and on-line editions dedicated to bison ranching, and bison restoration across the United States. The magazine cover contained a photo of a bison, along with the headline The Great American Bison.

The main story focused on the family of NBA members Lee and Mary Graese, founders and owners of Northstar Bison in Rice Lake, WI. Other articles covered the environmental and nutritional benefits of bison, along with some historical facts.

Below are the introductions to some of the major articles. The entire series is available here: <http://modernfarmer.com/tag/bison-week/>

## **Bison: At Home, On the Range**

In 1994, when Mary and Lee Graese bought their first two bison, beef was what's for dinner, as Robert Mitchum's voice intoned on the omnipresent television ads. We're talking a few years before those Texas cattle ranchers sued Oprah over her mad cow-related comments and nearly a decade before Ted Turner launched Ted's Montana Grill—giving many Americans their first taste of bison, in chili, over nachos, and formed into lean burgers topped with jalapeños or blue cheese.

Yet Lee Graese humbly waves off any notion that he possessed uncannily prescient business savvy. "Initially, this was going to be a hobby," he says of the dusky brown bull, Billy, and tawny heifer calf, Sarah, that he and his wife purchased from Minnesota's Blue Mounds State Park as its rangers thinned the herd. "But we realized, after learning a bit more about the meat, that there was potentially a huge market for it."

Two decades later, the price of bison meat—high in protein, low in fat and cholesterol, and, if grass-fed, rich in omega-3s—has tripled, from \$1.50 to more than \$4.50 a pound. In the past five years alone, restaurant and super-market sales have increased by \$100 million. "We've not been able to grow fast enough," says Lee, CEO of [NorthStar Bison](#). The Graeses' company currently comprises a 700-head herd, grazing on a dozen properties throughout northwest Wisconsin, including a ranch in Rice Lake, where the family lives, and in east-central Minnesota. The domain totals some 1,800 acres.

Lee and Mary's daughter Marielle Hewitt and son, Sean Graese, oversee day-to-day ranch and business management, respectively. And the orders keep pouring in for their grass-fed and -finished plains bison (the only breed in America). "In the first few months of 2016," says Lee, "we had requests for five times the amount of product that we could possibly pull together in an entire year."

During the 1600s, bison were so prevalent in the territory that became Wisconsin that French explorer Pierre-Esprit Radisson reportedly called the region's Eastern Dakota tribe "The Nation of Beef." Historical accounts from the mid-1700s refer to bison crossing the Wisconsin River in such prodigious numbers that settlers had to sit and wait for the animals to clear before canoes could pass safely.

Then, in the 1870s, President Ulysses S. Grant and his advisers decided the best way to force Native Americans to assimilate would be to eliminate their food supply. The federal government paid hunters \$80 a day (the equivalent of \$1,400 now), and a single outing sometimes yielded 2,000 carcasses. The railroad's western expansion also took a serious toll. By 1885, the number of bison in this country had shrunk from upwards of 30 million to less than 350. The latest stats put the United States total near 300,000—much improved, but a far cry from our nation's once-thriving population.

The Graeses have adopted a measured approach to expanding their herd. Due to the small pool of available bulls, in-breeding remains a long-term concern. Plus, bison [don't take to artificial insemination](#) like cattle. "This is not an animal you can accelerate," explains Marielle, 26. "And for us, it's a marathon, not a sprint."

Though the vast majority of bison farmed in America eat (or are at least finished on) grain, NorthStar's subsist solely on grass. Such pasture-raised purity means the Graeses' bison reach market weight 6 to 14 months later than their grain-fed brethren—an investment the company doesn't recoup at the consumer level.

"Our philosophy is to work with nature, not against it," says Sean, 29. "We let bison be bison." Marielle reserves two acres of land per head, rotating the herd every few days. Beyond that, the animals require little intervention. Electrified fences discourage straying. There are no barns. NorthStar doesn't brand, dehorn, inject growth hormones (per federal law), or administer antibiotics (against [National Bison Association](#) rules). Explains Marielle, "Bison do a very, very good job of taking care of themselves."

Full story at: <http://modernfarmer.com/2016/09/bison/>

### **Bison: The American Prairie's First Farmers**

"Nature never tries to farm without animals," said the British agriculturalist [Sir Albert Howard](#), often considered the father of the modern organic farming movement. For millennia, bison were effectively the farmers of North America's vast interior grasslands, maintaining a delicate ecological balance that supported a rich diversity of plant and animal species.

Most importantly, bison made sure the prairie stayed a prairie, rather than reverting to forest, which offers little to eat for such large herbivores. Grazing—along with fires (both naturally-occurring and intentionally set by native peoples)—are the two forces of nature that conspire to manage grasslands the world over.

While cattle and other domesticated livestock are often used often used to manage grasslands in other parts of the world, bison appear to be the species best-suited to controlling the North American prairie that they've coevolved with.

In fact, a 1976 [experiment](#) in South Dakota demonstrated that bison are the prairie's go-to: Cattle were grazed on one side of a fence and bison on the other side. Ponderosa pines soon sprouted and grew into a canopy on the side with the cattle, while the bison chomped down on the seedlings as they sprouted on their side and prevented a forest from becoming established.

Grasslands once comprised 40 percent of the North American landscape, but after bison were hunted nearly to extinction in the 19th century, the prairies of the heartland were converted to farms and cities on a vast scale: 99 percent of tallgrass prairie and 68 percent of mixed-grass prairie have disappeared, making grasslands North America's [most endangered ecosystem](#). As the [keystone species](#) of the prairie—that is, the one who holds it together for all the other species—bison are being actively reintroduced to conservation areas throughout the Midwest in an effort to bring [degraded prairie ecosystems](#) back to life. Here are five ways they do it.

Read the five ways here: <http://modernfarmer.com/2014/07/bison-natural/>

## Why Bison Do It All-Natural

After an extremely close brush with extinction in the late 19th century, American bison have made an unusual sort of comeback, almost entirely in commercial herds on farms and ranches where they're raised for their [lean, nutrient-dense](#) meat.

It's an arrangement that puts these animals in a curious existential limbo between plain old livestock and icons of wild, wide-open freedom. Accordingly, bison farmers' management and marketing techniques tend have a strong au naturel flavor: [no growth hormones](#), no antibiotics except to treat disease, free-range, grass-fed, et cetera et cetera.

"Our goal has been to handle them as little as possible and leave them in that semi-wild state, because that's part of their allure – just this natural, wild animal," says Debbi Tanner, of [Creamery Brook Bison](#) in Brooklyn, Connecticut.

That means no [artificial insemination](#) (AI), either. Bison may generally be confined in pastures these days, but they still do it just like they did when they roamed the Great Plains by the millions. (A [large majority](#) of pigs and dairy cows in the U.S. are bred with AI, though it remains relatively uncommon for beef cattle.)

"We definitely choose to go the natural route," says Jim Matheson, assistant director of the [National Bison Association](#). "Our producers are very committed to raising these animals responsibly and as nature intended."

There are good logistical reasons to let bison just do it on the range, too: they're big, they can be aggressive and because they're not technically [domesticated](#), they don't usually do well with confinement or close human contact. Since semen collection and AI require contact of the closest kind, it's not a terribly compatible practice with bison farming.

Full story at: <http://modernfarmer.com/2014/07/bison-natural/>

## The New U.S. National Mammal, the Bison Is a Unifying Icon

*(Blog by John F. Calvelli)*

*[NOTE: This is the second in a series of blogs by WCS staff at the [IUCN World Conservation Congress](#) taking place September 1–10 in Honolulu, Hawaii]*

I am currently attending the World Conservation Congress and, as you can well imagine, we are discussing many of the challenges facing wildlife. In the midst of these sessions I have been fortunate to participate in one that tells the story that when we work together we can succeed and bring nature back from the brink.

I am speaking about bison. The bison has been culturally, historically and ecologically important to the United States. They are also deeply connected to the [history of WCS](#) (Wildlife Conservation Society)—which I represent as Executive Vice President for Public Affairs—and its [Bronx Zoo](#). Amazingly, more than 30 million were hunted in the 1800s until fewer than one thousand remained.

Thanks to the heroic efforts at the turn of the 20th century by Bronx Zoo founding director William Hornaday and countless Americans, including President [Theodore Roosevelt](#), the extinction of this majestic animal was prevented. Many consider this the first successful conservation story in U.S. history.

We thought it was important to share that story at the Congress. History was made this past spring as legislation to make the bison the national mammal of the United States was [signed into law](#) by President Obama. This marked the final step in a four-year effort to honor the bison. As the national mammal, bison joined the bald eagle (the U.S. national emblem, designated in 1782 by the 2nd Continental Congress) as an official symbol of the U.S.

The victory was achieved largely through the collective work of the [Vote Bison Coalition](#), a group of more than 60 organizations, tribes, and businesses led by the [Inter Tribal Buffalo Council](#), [National Bison Association](#), and WCS.

The effort to make the bison our national mammal could never have been achieved without the support of many dedicated members of the U.S. Congress—including Sen. John Hoeven (R-ND), Sen. Martin Heinrich (D-NM), Rep. William Lacy Clay (D-MO), Rep. Jeff Fortenberry (R-NE), Rep. Kristi Noem (R-SD), and Rep. José Serrano (D-NY). These leaders championed the bill in Congress, along with many co-sponsors from both parties.

For me, the adoption of bison as U.S. national mammal powerfully validates the many meaningful ways this animal represents the nation. As an ecological keystone, cultural bedrock, and economic driver, the bison conveys values such as unity, resilience, and commitment to healthy landscapes and communities.

But on a personal level, the work of collaborating with our Congressional champions has been an especially rewarding experience. One of the bill's longtime advocates, [Rep. Clay of Missouri](#), has said “no other indigenous species tells America's story” better than the bison, an animal that is a symbol of strength and Native American culture.

Source; <https://medium.com/@WCS/conservation-now-blogging-from-iucn-2016-f069391c8588#.fj55bhtqj>

## **Bison Are a Conservation Success Story – And The National Mammal** *[\(From The Olympian\)](#)*

In May, the American bison was named the national mammal of the United States. These bearded, brown-eyed bovine are iconic symbols of the American West.

The American bison is large. Very large. Actually, it's the largest land mammal native to North America. Males can grow to weigh more than 1 ton and can be up to 6 feet tall at the shoulder, with horns up to 2 feet long. Bison also are quite strong, with the ability to run 30 mph when startled.

Bison have remarkably thick fur coats that protect them from the elements. A bison's coat changes color as it grows, starting as burnt orange at birth and turning chocolate brown over a few months.

These massive mammals are built to tolerate cold weather. Fur provides insulation similar to a puffy winter jacket: Snow can fall on a bison's back without melting. Bison also use their massive heads to push snow aside in winter months when searching for grasses to eat.

In spring, the outer layer of fur is shed, giving bison a shaggy and unkempt appearance. American bison herds are separated into male and female groups for most of the year, although young male calves stay with their mothers. Bison roll around in dirt, eat grasses and other vegetation, and communicate through grunts, growls and snorts. Male bison are known as bulls, while females are cows.

Bison are ruminants, meaning they have multiple stomach chambers that help them break down large amounts of plant food. Like dairy cattle, they chew their food, digest it for a while in the stomach, then chew it some more. This is known as "chewing their cud." Bacteria in the stomach helps convert plant molecules into more easily digestible compounds.

Read more here: <http://www.theolympian.com/outdoors/article101134917.html#storylink=cpy>

## **Bison's National Mammal Status Delivers Nothing More than a Title**

*(From In These Times)*

Native Americans naturally greet any U.S. federal legislation that involves their culture with skepticism. The National Bison Legacy Act (NBLA) is no exception. Despite its support from tribal governments, communities and their allies, the bill granting the bison "national mammal" status remains problematic.

The NBLA, adopted by Congress with unanimous consent this past April, follows in the footsteps of the establishment of National Bison Day, which passed in Fall 2015 and designates the first Saturday of November as the annual day of celebration.

Bison deserve both honors. They can run up to 35 mph and, whether commercially, privately or publicly owned, are found in every U.S. state. For centuries, Native Americans have culturally respected and coveted the animal. (Note that North American bison, with their small sharp horns and large hump, are still often confused with buffalo, who have long horns and no hump. This misclassification is believed to originate with Europeans who noted their resemblance to Asian and African buffalo.)

An initial concern with any federal action integrating Native American issues is invisibility. In particular, the federal government chronically fails to include Native voices or perspectives. This particular piece of legislation attempts to interrupt that trend. The cultural significance of bison to Native nations is mentioned a handful of times throughout the NBLA, which cites Native advocacy as a reason for the legislation. The [Inter-Tribal Buffalo Council](#) (ITBC), made up of 62 tribes from 19 states, is also acknowledged in the text.

[Full story: http://inthesetimes.com/rural-america/entry/19466/national-bison-legacy-act-wildlife-management-inter-tribal-buffalo-council](http://inthesetimes.com/rural-america/entry/19466/national-bison-legacy-act-wildlife-management-inter-tribal-buffalo-council)

## **Bringing Back the Bison**

*(From Al Jazeera)*

The Nachusa Grasslands Preserve in Franklin Grove, Illinois, is currently under the care of The Nature Conservancy, a charitable environmental organization, as they try to restore a piece of American history that was almost extinct - the grassland prairie.

Where there was once an abundance of grasslands in the United States, there is now less than 0.01 percent of the original grassland areas left standing. Dozens of plant species native to the grasslands are also at risk of extinction, along with their natural habitat.

With prairie grasslands heralded as the climate change equivalent of a rainforest in terms of long-term carbon dioxide storage in its soil, the gradual disappearance of this particular ecosystem is being combated in every way experts at The Nature Conservancy know how. One of the methods of ensuring the grasslands are achieving maximum growth potential is the manual collection of species of plant seeds from remnant prairies to sow in the new expanses. Approximately 250 species are planted annually by the Conservancy and their volunteers, equating millions of actual seeds going into the ground.

But with the excitement of planting above the numbers suggested by conventional wisdom, that's 23kg instead of 4.5kg of seeds a year, arose the issue of overly successful tall grass growth. In order to maintain the steady revival of the grasslands and all facets of the ecosystem, something had to be introduced to "even out the playing field" and thin out the quantities of grass.

The natural solution was a herd of bison. Nutrient cycling due to grazing and excretion on the grasslands provides a natural diversity to the area, while the natural weight - up to 900kg for a full-grown bull - and feeding habits of the bison also lend to the "flattening" out necessary to the overall health of the preserve.

[Read more at: http://www.aljazeera.com/programmes/techknow/2016/09/bringing-bison-160907075257372.html](http://www.aljazeera.com/programmes/techknow/2016/09/bringing-bison-160907075257372.html)

## **FDA Seeks Public Input on Next Steps to Help Ensure Judicious Use of Antimicrobials in Animal Agriculture**

*(From the FDA)*

The U.S. Food and Drug Administration announced today it is entering the next phase of its efforts to mitigate antimicrobial resistance by focusing for the first time on medically important antimicrobials (i.e., those important for treating human disease) used in animal feed or water that have at least one therapeutic indication without a defined duration of use.

As the agency completes its work to implement changes under [Guidance for Industry #213](#), which will, once fully implemented, limit the use of these drugs to therapeutic-only use under the oversight of a veterinarian, it is now turning its attention to ways to address those antimicrobials that may currently be legally used in food animals for no defined length of time.

Although GFI #213 outlines the FDA's expectation that any new approvals of medically important antimicrobial drugs administered to animals via feed and water will have a defined amount of time they can be used, the guidance does not address some currently approved therapeutics that lack defined durations of use on their labels. In a notice published today in the

Federal Register, the agency requests information from the public about how to establish appropriately targeted durations of use for the approximately 32% of therapeutic products affected by GFI #213 with no defined duration of use in order to foster stewardship of medically important antimicrobial drugs in food-producing animals and help preserve the effectiveness of these antimicrobials in animal and human medicine. Specifically, for certain species and disease indications as listed in the FR notice, the FDA wants to obtain additional information on: The underlying diseases requiring these drugs for therapeutic purposes, and periods when livestock or poultry are at risk of developing these diseases; More targeted antimicrobial use regimens for these diseases and husbandry practices that may help avoid the need for these antimicrobials, or that may help make more targeted antimicrobial use regimens more effective; and Strategies for updating affected labeling of drug products that do not currently include a defined duration of use.

Today's action furthers the FDA's overall efforts to ensure medically important antimicrobials are used in food animals only for health purposes as outlined in the agency's GFI #213. In accordance with the FDA's strategy, drug sponsors have committed in writing to changing the labeling of their medically important antimicrobials used in food animals. These changes are expected to result in these drugs only being used for therapeutic animal health purposes under the oversight of a veterinarian starting January 1, 2017.

The FDA is accepting public comments for 90 days beginning on September 14. To electronically submit comments to the docket, visit <http://www.regulations.gov> and type FDA-2016-D-2635 in the search box.

To submit comments to the docket by mail, use the following address. Please be sure to include docket number FDA-2016-D-2635 on each page of your written comments.

Division of Dockets Management  
HFA-305  
Food and Drug Administration  
5630 Fishers Lane, Room 1061  
Rockville, MD 20852

## **More School Districts Pushing Healthy Foods, Survey Shows**

More school cafeterias are using strategies to increase consumption of fruits, vegetables and other healthy choices, while expanding student access to school meals through government programs such as the Community Eligibility Provision (CEP), according to a [new national survey](#) of school meal program operators.

The findings are part of the School Nutrition Association (SNA)'s "School Nutrition Operations Report: The State of School Nutrition 2016," based on survey responses from nearly 1,000 school nutrition directors nationwide.

"Just like parents, school nutrition professionals know that offering kids healthier options is only half the battle - we also have to entice them to eat those nutritious choices," SNA President Becky Domokos-Bays said in a release. "Despite tight meal program budgets, school nutrition professionals are employing creative tactics to promote healthy menu options as they welcome students back to the school cafeteria."

The survey found that since 2014, when the majority of updated nutrition standards for school meals were in effect, more school meal programs have launched initiatives to market healthier school food choices and increase their appeal among students. For example: Nearly 50 percent of responding districts have implemented Farm to School initiatives (up from 37.5 percent in the 2014 survey);

72 percent employ student taste tests or sampling (up from 64 percent);  
18 percent have chef partnerships/recipe development (up from 12 percent).  
The survey also revealed these initiatives are being considered or planned in 15 percent to 24 percent of additional districts.

School districts are also offering a wider variety of choices to appeal to diverse student tastes and dietary needs or preferences. Two-thirds of districts now offer salad or produce bars, up from 63 percent in 2014, the survey found, and 57 percent are providing locally sourced fruits and vegetables, up from 52 percent.

Additionally, meal programs are making it easier for parents and students to learn about menu options and to manage school meal payments. Almost 82 percent of districts say they are offering parents the option of paying for meals online.

## **Bovine TB Topic Of Dearborn, Franklin County Meetings [IN]**

*(From EagleCountryOnline.com)*

(Brookville, Ind.) - The DNR Division of Fish & Wildlife has scheduled two public meetings to discuss a management and surveillance plan in response to the recent finding of bovine tuberculosis in a wild white-tailed deer.

The first meeting is at 6:30 p.m. Thursday, Sept. 15 at the Franklin County Government Center, 1010 Franklin Ave., Brookville, IN, 47012.

The second meeting is at 6:30 p.m. Wednesday, Sept. 21 at the Dearborn County Fairgrounds, 351 East Eads Parkway, Lawrenceburg, IN, 47025.

DNR deer biologist Joe Caudell will outline the plan for deer hunting season that establishes a management zone in part of Fayette County and all of Franklin County, and a surveillance zone in part of Dearborn County.

Hunter-harvested deer in those zones will be subject to periods of mandatory and voluntary submission to biological check stations so they can be tested for bovine tuberculosis.

Full text:

<http://eaglecountryonline.com/local-article/bovine-tb-topic-dearborn-franklin-county-meetings/>