



## **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 30, 2016**

### **Final Day to Vote in Regional Director Elections**

Today is the final day for balloting for National Bison Association members in Regions I, III, V and VII for their candidates to represent them on the association's board of directors from the next two years. The directors elected in that balloting will serve from January 2017 through January 2019.

Ballots were emailed again last week to members in the following regions.

Region I is comprised of Alaska, Arizona, California, Hawaii, Idaho, Nevada, Oregon, Utah and Washington. Alan Douglass, the current director, is the candidate for reelection.

Region III is comprised of Montana, North Dakota and South Dakota. John Cammack of Stoneville, SD and Mimi Hillenbrand of Rapid City are the two candidates for that seat.

Region V is comprised of Iowa, Minnesota, Nebraska and Wisconsin. Tom Barthel, the current director, is the candidate for reelection.

Region VII is comprised of Connecticut, Delaware, Maine, Massachusetts, Michigan, New Hampshire, New Jersey New York, Ohio, Pennsylvania, Rhode Island and Vermont. Brian Grubb of New York and Kevin MacRitchie of Michigan are candidates for that seat.

Ballots have also been mailed to members in the four regions who have not registered email addresses with the association. All mail-in ballots must be postmarked by today. Please be sure to only vote once by email or mail-in, as voting more than once will invalidate your vote.

### **Bison Association Awarded Three Year Grant for Local Food Promotion**

The National Bison Association this week was awarded a \$213,272 three-year grant from the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Farmers' Market Promotion Program to strengthen bison producers' ability to connect with their local community at farmers' markets, through agritourism activities, and with other direct marketing initiatives.

The bison association's grant award was part of \$26.8 million in Farmers' Market and Local Food Promotion Program grants announced yesterday by Agriculture Secretary Tom Vilsack at the *New York Times* Food for Tomorrow Conference in New York City. The grants are administered by AMS and create economic opportunities for producers, increase access to fresh, healthy food for consumers, and connect rural and urban communities across the country.

Dave Carter, executive director of the National Bison Association, said, "This grant proposal was developed with the assistance of bison producers across the country who are engaged in farmers' markets and agritourism. The support provided through the grant will allow us to develop resources and programs to help smaller producers expand their businesses."

Grant funds will be used to develop training resources, conduct workshops across the country, and to develop on-line directories to connect urban residents with bison producers in their region. The grant will also fund a series of "pop-up" bison culinary events in selected U.S. cities during the final year of the project.

U.S. Sen. Michael Bennet (D-CO), said, "Colorado has a rich agricultural heritage that includes a strong bison ranching tradition. This grant will help bison producers around the country increase their opportunities to market their products to consumers. It will help boost the bottom line for our bison ranchers and help grow our agriculture sector."

Elanor Starmer, administrator of the USDA's Agricultural Marketing Service, said, "All around the country, we're seeing farms and small food businesses grow when they tap into markets for local foods. There's so much consumer interest in buying local, and these grant programs help build that connection. Whether it's through farmers' markets, food hubs, restaurants or grocery stores, when farms and ranches can sell their products locally, it helps bolster rural economies and improve access to healthy foods for our nation's families."

## **Montana Conservation District Asks Voters to Restrict Bison Production**

The National Bison Association and Montana Bison Association are continuing to explore options to address spreading trend among conservation districts in eastern Montana to enact ordinances restricting bison production within their jurisdictions.

Four counties have already enacted the restrictive ordinances, and voters in Cart County will be asked to weigh in on a similar measure in November.

The ordinances being enacted would prohibit any bison grazing activity without a permit from the appropriate conservation district. In order to obtain a permit, bison producers would have to gain approval of a conservation plan that lists the maximum number of animal units, verifies health and disease testing plan, and provides for a comprehensive conservation plan.

The MtBA and NBA recently filed a joint letter with the conservation district. That letter stated, in part, "This proposed ordinance casts a broad brush that fails to distinguish between commercial bison production, and wild, free-roaming bison. Commercial bison ranchers—including some in the Carter County District—adhere to the same conservation ethic as their neighbors in the cattle and sheep business. The members of the Montana Bison Association consistently strive

to act as good neighbors, and to build our herds in a manner that does not interfere with other livestock production.

"This ordinance, however, would single out bison producers for extremely restrictive oversight that would be more onerous than regulations regarding other commercial livestock species that can have equal negative impacts on land and water resources."

The NBA is now consulting legal officials to explore options for addressing these ordinances.

## **American Bison Society Gathering Discusses Conservation Successes, Future**

The Wildlife Conservation Society hosted its 4<sup>th</sup> American Bison Society meeting in Alberta, Canada this week to discuss issues affecting the continued restoration of the American bison.

The conference brought in over 150 wildlife biologists, veterinarians, tribal leaders, agency administrators, herd managers, bison producers and more to discuss topics impacting the conservation and preservation of the species.

Canadian Bison Association executive director, Terry Keremeniuk, participated in the conference in a panel discussion titled "Are Bison Wild or Not" and laid out the many attributes that allow bison producers to raise and restore bison to the prairie. NBA assistant director Jim Matheson was also in attendance, along with NBA Conservation Committee chair, Donald Beard. National Buffalo Foundation president, Cecil Miskin, was also in attendance.

The conference concluded on Thursday with the historic official Buffalo Treaty signing ceremony in the town of Banff.

## **Enroll in Conservation Herd Registry at Reduced Price**

Producers can enroll in the North American Bison Registry's Conservation Herd Program for a \$110 initial enrollment fee, and a \$50 annual report fee.

The recommendation was approved unanimously in the interest of economics for the membership. The Conservation Herd Registry (CHR) was innovated by the NABR, and approved by the NBA Board of Directors to help tell the story of bison ranching as a species restoration vehicle, which is identified indisputably as integral to the most successful post-bottleneck wildlife recovery in the history of the planet.

Said CHR chairman, Dr. Gerald Parsons, "the ultimate goal of the Conservation Herd Registry, and the reason for its inception, is to take proactive steps to record bison and their genetics as we continue to restore the species. It will further offer a marketing advantage to those participating by providing an affidavit to marketers looking to promote their product as such".

Learn more about the NABR and CHR here: <http://bisoncentral.com/about-nba/bison-registry>

## **Advocates Say Hunts, Slaughter Threaten Yellowstone Bison**

*(From the Billings Gazette)*

Wildlife advocacy groups are suing to force the U.S. government to look again at whether the hunting and slaughter of bison that wander outside of Yellowstone National Park threaten the survival of one of the last genetically pure populations of the national mammal.

Buffalo Field Campaign, Western Watersheds Project and Friends of Animals filed the lawsuit against the Interior Department and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Monday in U.S. District Court in the District of Columbia. They are asking a judge to order federal wildlife officials to re-examine whether the Yellowstone bison should be listed as a threatened or endangered species.

Bison, which Congress designated as the national mammal earlier this year, were hunted to near extinction in the late 19th century. The estimated 4,900 Yellowstone bison are one of the last remaining populations in the U.S. that don't have cattle genes in their DNA.

The Fish and Wildlife Service earlier this year rejected two petitions seeking federal protections for Yellowstone bison that would prevent them from being hunted, rounded up for slaughter or hazed back into the park when they leave in search of food.

Federal wildlife officials said in rejecting the petitions that Yellowstone bison numbers are stable and growing, and there is no scientific information that would lead to their being considered threatened or endangered.

A consortium of federal, state and tribal officials that manage the bison aims for a population of about 3,000. The Interagency Bison Management Plan calls for decreasing the existing population through hunting outside of the park's boundaries and capturing them for slaughter, relocation or research.

In the lawsuit, the wildlife groups say the Yellowstone bison numbers are too few, they lack genetic diversity and they are confined within a small portion of its historical range. "It's not a viable population," said Mike Harris. "There's too much inbreeding and they're subject to population collapse if disease hits the herd or there is a change in habitat due to drought or climate change."

The wildlife groups are asking a federal judge to order the government to withdraw its rejection of the petitions seeking to list Yellowstone bison as endangered or threatened, and to issue a new finding within 60 days of the court's order.

Yellowstone officials did not return calls for comment.

## **Central Illinois Farmer Raises Bison**

*(From Agri-News)*

NEWMAN, Ill. — David Ruhter's Prairie Rim Ranch business cards include a tidbit of information beyond phone number and address that is thought-provoking: "Bison — Feeding America for over 10,000 years."

These big, beautiful beasts that served as a primary food staple for Native Americans for thousands of years were driven to near extinction in the 1800s from commercial hunting, slaughter and the introduction of bovine diseases from domestic cattle. Populations shrank from about 40 million in 1830 to just 300 in 1900.

Fortunately, individual ranchers and the federal government were able to protect all that was left of the bison population, and the herd on private and public lands now stands at more than 400,000.

Ruhter and his wife, Kathleen, operate one of 2,564 bison farms and ranches across the nation. They recently opened up their 68-acre 33-head ranch for a tour as part of the National Bison Association Advantage workshop.

Bison meat is touted for its health benefits with less fat, calories and cholesterol and higher protein, iron and vitamin B-12 than cattle beef, according to U.S. Department of Agriculture's National Nutrient Database for Standard Reference.

Going into the bison production business was a natural for Ruhter who worked for 20 years at zoos. The journey began about 12 years ago when he was considering his options once he retired.

"I helped write the industry standards for hoof stock, as well as old world primates, and pioneered new ways of handling elephants, so I knew animals," Ruhter said.

"When we decided to get out of the zoos, it was like 'what are we going to do when we retire.' I wanted to do something with animals and my wife, Kathleen, wanted to do something in the health field because she's a physical therapist, so we started looking at bison and it just kind of mixed very well.

"I started tracking the price of meat around 2004, 2005 because I really didn't want to get into something like ostriches or giraffes where there was no consumer market. We followed the bison meat market for three or four years, and the prices just kept going up and up and up and up. So we thought maybe this was a viable option."

USDA's Agricultural Marketing Service Grain and Livestock Market Reporting Service reported this month the average per pound prices for grass-fed bison meat ranged from \$41.80 for filet mignon to \$11.87 for bulk lean ground bison compared to \$28.99 and \$6.58 ground sirloin prices for beef, respectively.

Full story: <http://agrinews-pubs.com/Content/Default/Illinois-News/Article/Central-Illinois-farmer-raises-bison/-3/78/16136>

## **Kazakhstan Visitors Get Bison Experience in Montana**

*(From the Great Falls Tribune)*

WorldMontana recently hosted a group of four International Visitor Leadership Program delegates from Kazakhstan who had come to experience Montana, and get some ideas as to how to improve the Kazakhstani beef industry.

They met with state livestock and agriculture officials, visited the Helena Farmers Market and visited the Wild Echo Bison Ranch in the Big Belt Mountains outside Townsend.

"They were captivated by this working bison ranch and were particularly impressed by the care and treatment of the herd of wild bison," WorldMontana officials said.

The 480-acre ranch was established in 2003, and is a wildlife preserve owned and operated by wildlife biologists Pam and Craig Knowles.

The remote property has scores of species of wildlife and more than 70 bison. The ranch focuses on education and preservation of resources and offers small-scale overnight visitor opportunities with the chance to stay in cozy cabins or tipis, complete with home-cooked meals. Throughout their stay, guests will get the chance to interact with the wild animals and learn about a wide range of ecological topics from two incredibly well-educated and passionate individuals.

The visitors from Kazakhstan were able to interact with the bison herd.

"The Kazakhstani visitors were inspired by the natural approach to ranching, and the connection and passion that the two owners offered," WorldMontana officials said.

As Craig Knowles put it: "People have to know about wilderness to love it. And if they love it, they will fight to preserve it. Our mission is to introduce them to it."

Helena-based WorldMontana is a member of Global Ties U.S. (formerly National Council for International Visitors) based in Washington, D.C. It is one of 95 U.S., nonprofit centers that promote global understanding through citizen diplomacy.

Read or Share this story: <http://gftrib.com/2dr4hb2>

## **Beef, Veal, Bison Products Voluntarily Recalled After E. Coli Outbreak** *(From ABC News)*

A voluntary recall of beef, veal and bison products has been issued by the Adams Farm Slaughterhouse over concerns the products might contain E. coli bacteria, according to the U.S. Department of Agriculture's food Safety and inspection service.

At least seven people in four states have been identified as infected with a potentially deadly strain of E. coli, O157:H7, that is believed to be linked to the Adams Farm Slaughterhouse, according to the USDA.

Those infected became sick from June 27 to Sept. 4 and were identified in Connecticut, Massachusetts, Pennsylvania and West Virginia, and five patients have reportedly been hospitalized, according to the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Those sickened were 1 to 74 years old, and 57 percent were female, according to the CDC.

Of the five patients interviewed so far, all reported consuming Adams Farms Slaughterhouse products, according to the USDA. In addition to interviews, the CDC utilizes a national database

designed to catch emerging outbreaks by looking for DNA matches from bacterial samples of infected people, indicating they were likely infected by the same source.

The products were shipped to various locations, including farmers' markets, retail locations and restaurants in Massachusetts, Connecticut, and eastern New York, according to the USDA. They may have also been shipped to neighboring states, the USDA said.

The products affected by the recall were from animals slaughtered on July 15, 25 and 27 and Aug. 3, 8, 10, 11, 17, 24 and 26 and were packed on various dates from July 21 to Sept 22, according to the CDC.

The products made from animals slaughtered before July 15 were not recalled, in part because any products made earlier than the recall dates would have expired anyway, a federal official told ABC News.

The USDA is still investigating and will expand the recall if needed, a USDA spokesman said.

Read more. <http://abcnews.go.com/Health/beef-veal-bison-products-voluntarily-recalled-coli-outbreak/story?id=42361844>

## FDA Takes Step for New Healthy Label Definition

(From the Wall Street Journal)

The U.S. Food and Drug Administration on Tuesday took the first step toward redefining its decades-old definition of "healthy," following pressure from food companies that say the current regulations are outdated.

Regulators are now seeking opinions from consumers, companies and other members of the public on how the term "healthy" should be used on food packaging. It's a process that will likely take years to complete, but it marks a major step in the FDA's effort to catch up to changing ideas about health.

When the term "healthy" was first officially defined in 1994, low fat content was the main focus of health professionals. Sugar wasn't on the FDA's, or most nutritionists', radar.

So under the current definition, food makers can only claim their product is healthy if it meets criteria for being low in fat, saturated fat, sodium and cholesterol, while having a certain amount of beneficial nutrients, such as vitamin C or Calcium. Frosted Flakes cereal would be considered healthy because they meet all the criteria, from low fat to fortified with vitamins, while almonds and avocados aren't because they have too much fat, according to today's rules.

Kind Snacks, which makes fruit-and-nut bars, began campaigning to update the definition of "healthy" after it received a warning letter from the regulator last year ordering it to stop using the term on its packaging because its bars contained too much saturated fat.

"We're encouraged by the speed of progress within the FDA," Kind CEO Daniel Lubetzky said Tuesday.

The FDA said that while it considers how to redefine the rule, it will exercise discretion in enforcing the current one, so as not to take action against food makers like Kind that don't meet the exact terms for "healthy" but still are low in total fat and provide at least 10% of the recommended potassium or vitamin D per serving.

"While we are working on the 'healthy' claim, we also will begin evaluating other label claims to determine how they might be modernized," Mr. Balentine said.

"As our understanding about nutrition has evolved, we need to make sure the definition for the 'healthy' labeling claim stays up to date," Douglas Balentine, Director of the Office of Nutrition and Food Labeling at the FDA, said in a statement Tuesday.

Full story at: <http://www.wsj.com/articles/fda-takes-step-toward-new-healthy-labeling-1475001536>

## Farm Ops Online Course Scholarships for Veterans

The Cornell Small Farms Program is pleased to offer partial scholarships for military veterans to take our online courses as part of the Farm Ops initiative. The courses, normally \$250, will be offered to veterans for \$125. In order to be eligible a person must be a veteran or active duty military, a resident of New York State, and have plans to begin selling farm products (filing a Schedule F) in 2016 or 2017. In order to view the course offerings and schedules go to: <http://www.nebeginningfarmers.org/online-courses/>.

If you are eligible and would like to apply for a scholarship, complete a short form here. Registration is limited and will be offered first come, first served. Participants will be asked to complete a targeted survey at the end of the course as well as 6 months from completion, to determine the effect on their operation.

Read more. <http://www.nebeginningfarmers.org/2016/09/01/online-course-scholarships-for-veterans/>