



# National Bison Association

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## An Overview of Today's Bison Business

### National Bison Association Priority Issues Briefing Paper September 2017

The bison business today stands in a position of unparalleled strength, stability and profitability.

When the USDA began tracking the wholesale bison meat prices in June 2004, the price for a slaughter bull carcass was reported at \$1.60/lb., or about \$960 for a 600/lb. carcass. In June 2017, that same USDA report listed the average value of a bull carcass at \$4.83/lb., or \$2,898 for a 600-lb. carcass; an increase in value of more than 300%. Just as important, the bison marketplace has not experienced the volatility that continually plagues mainstream commodities. The bison carcass price topped \$4.00/lb. in 2011, and has remained above that level for the past six years. Based on a twice-yearly survey conducted among commercial marketers by the National Bison Association, customer demand continues to climb.

This steady growth has been driven by the perseverance of the National Bison Association, and by individual ranchers and marketers. Our message of great-tasting, sustainably raised healthy meat is resonating with a growing segment of the American—and international—public.

USDA has played a strong supporting role in this success story. Resources provided over the past decade have strengthened the bison industry's financial viability in many ways:

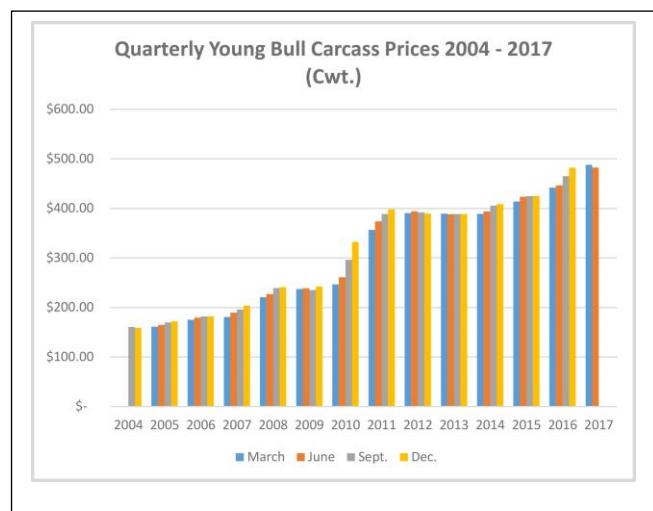


Figure 1 Source: USDA Crop & Livestock Reporting Service

- RMA and SARE grant resources have underwritten the development of a series of educational and outreach tools, including the new *Bison Producers' Handbook*, an *Insider's Guide to Bison Handling and Management* DVD, and on-line curriculum for new producers.
- Those funds also enabled the association to develop a Bison Advantage training program that has been presented in eight states, and on two Native American reservations.
- A Farmers Market Promotion Program grant is currently underwriting a series of activities to assist direct marketers, including new educational materials, an on-line directory, and a training program for producers.
- Earlier this year, APHIS issued its final report on *Bison 2014*, a comprehensive epidemiological study of the bison business. That report provided valuable insight into the bison herd health priorities, and the need for additional educational outreach to producers.
- Agricultural Research Service personnel and facilities have provided valuable assistance in helping the bison industry address disease issues that threaten the health of our bison herds.
- The monthly price report compiled by the Livestock and Grain Market Reporting Service, and the statistics captured by the National Agricultural Statistics Service, supply important data that helps us monitor market prices, processing, and herd development.

- The Foreign Agriculture Service, and the USTR, are working to open new markets for bison meat exports, and to address the prejudicial tariffs that are hindering the realization of marketing potential in the European Union.
- The ability for bison ranchers to access EQIP funding through NRCS is helping those producers to better manage their land, and to increase profitability.
- Similarly, access to disaster assistance programs through FSA is vital to producers impacted by natural disasters.

These programs and resources have supported the growth of the bison business over the past decade. But we have not yet begun to achieve our full potential.



This summer, the National Bison Association, InterTribal Buffalo Council, and the Wildlife Conservation Society, announced *Bison 1 Million*, a joint commitment to restore one million bison to North America. With roughly 400,000 bison now in private, tribal and public herds, this represents a commitment to more than doubling the North American herd.

Building the herds without compromising the quality of the meat, or the integrity of the animals, will require additional support and assistance.

It begins with keeping herds healthy. The NBA Science and Research Committee has identified key herd health priorities that can benefit from the resources available through NIFA, ARS, APHIS, and other agencies.

With bison ranching standing as a viable economic enterprise, we need to expand the ability to bring new producers into the business on private and tribal lands. Those newcomers need greater access to Beginning/Disadvantaged Farmer and Rancher programs through FSA.

We urge the USDA and the Department of Interior to explore new ways of working together to expand bison producers' access to grazing rights, and to identify public lands appropriate for bison restoration.

Bison producers face stiff challenges with processing and marketing infrastructure. We support the recommendations developed by the National Sustainable Ag Coalition's Small and Very Small Meat Plant Working Group. We urge that FSIS look for ways to reduce the cost that producers bear under voluntary inspection. And, we recommend that FSIS implement consistent policies for the implementation of the voluntary inspection program.

Finally, we need continued access to the programs that have supported the growth of our sector over the past decade.

The NBA, and its member-marketers are doing our part to continue to bring new customers to the table for bison meat. We are building distribution channels that allow people to find bison meat in venues ranging from farmers' markets, to major restaurant chains. We've even launched a campaign to promote Wednesdays—hump day—as *Bison Hump Day*, a playful effort to encourage people to incorporate bison into the meal-planning once each week.

