



National Bison Association

8690 Wolff Court, Suite 200 Westminster, CO 80031-3646
www.BisonCentral.com Phone: 303-292-2833 Fax: 303-845-9081

2018 Farm Bill Priorities For the American Bison Business

National Bison Association Priority Issues Briefing Paper
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Background

Bison producers' ability to access the resources available under the current farm bill has contributed to the growth, stability and profitability of the American bison business. EQIP assistance with cross-fencing, Risk Management Agency support for educational curriculum, access to disaster assistance, and Farmers' Market Promotion Program support for small marketers are only a few examples of the farm bill programs utilized by bison ranchers.

Here are the priorities that will continue to support the growth of the bison business in the years ahead.

Title I: Commodities & Assistance

Three specific disaster assistance programs have proven to be a very valuable safety net for bison producers. We recommend an increase in the per-person cap under LIP and ELAP, primarily because of the increase in the value of animals. For example, the average increase at three bellwether auctions in the bison business indicate that prices for bred heifers, yearling bulls and heifer calves have all increase more than 55% in the past five years.

- Continue the Livestock Indemnity Program (LIP), and increase the per-person payment limit to \$150,000 from the current \$125,000.
- Continue Forage Disaster Program (LFP) with the current per-person payment limit of \$125,000.
- Continue the Emergency Livestock Assistance Program, and increase the per-person payment limit to \$150,000 from the current level of \$125,000.

Title II: Conservation

We recognize that overall funding for conservation programs will not likely increase, and recommend that the existing funds be reallocated to meet the priority needs of producers. The priority programs for bison producers are:

- Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP). EQIP is extremely useful in assisting producers in cross-fencing and other improvements to enhance their pasture resources. We urge that the \$175 billion allocated for FY 2018 be gradually increased to \$200 billion by FY 2022. Additionally, retain the 50% advanced payment provisions for beginning, socially disadvantaged, veteran and limited resource producers.
- Continue the Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP) with the per person payment limitation maintained at \$200,000.
- A reduction in Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) funding can help offset additional funding for EQIP. Maintain the transition incentive at the current level, and provide new owners with access to information on alternative livestock production models, including bison.

- Continue to include bison as eligible livestock for all conservation programs.
- Support House language regarding continuation of EQIP program.

Title III. Trade

The bison business's ability to capitalize on the opportunities in the export market has been historically hampered by tariff barriers, and by outright prohibitions on bison by some countries. The USTR and USDA FAS are working to address those unfair barriers. The farm bill, therefore, should prepare to allow the bison business to capitalize on trade opportunities once those barriers are reduced and/or eliminated.

- Continue the Market Access program at current funding levels, and assure that bison meat marketers have equal access to those funds.

Title IV: Nutrition

- Continue the Food Distribution Program on Indian Reservations (FDPIR).
- Continue the Commodity Supplemental Food Program (CSFP) with \$200 million in annual funding.

Title V. Credit

- Continue the Consolidated Farm and Rural Development Act (ConAct) farm ownership and operating loans at current levels, and direct offices to consider alternative livestock enterprises as eligible applicants for those loans.
- Expand emphasis on the Loans to Purchasers of Highly Fractionated Land to provide greater incentives for Indian tribes or tribal corporations to buy highly fractionated land within the reservation.
- Assure that bison producers are eligible for all livestock programs.

Title VII: Research

Herd health is a key challenge facing the bison business, and a key factor that will determine the timeline for restoring one million bison to North America. Bison producers are not alone in this concern. The National Association of State Departments of Agriculture Farm Bill policy notes, "A proactive, multi-faceted animal disease program is needed to safeguard animal agriculture, promote sustainable economic development and prevent catastrophic events that could threaten our nation's food supply. Expanding on the authorization for the National Animal Health Laboratory Network, and modeled after the aforementioned invasive species programs, this program will bring together the federal government with states, industry, universities, and other agricultural stakeholders to reduce the impact of high-consequence animal diseases, provide rapid detection and response capabilities, develop disease prevention and mitigation technologies, support a vaccine bank infrastructure, prevent the entrance and spread of foreign animal diseases into the U.S., and identify & support critical research needs."

Key priorities include:

- Expand funding for the Agriculture and Food Research Initiative (AFRI) to \$900 million/yr. and provide incentives for projects involving collaboration between educational/research institutions and agricultural organizations.

- Provide \$25/million annually for the Beginning Farmer and Rancher Development Program that will enhance the sustainability of the next generation of farmers.
- Fund Animal Health and Disease Research Programs with funding at \$25 million/year.
 - Continue Support for the MCF research conducted at the Animal Disease Research Unit, USDA Agriculture Research Service at Washington State University, Pullman, WA and University of Wyoming in Laramie, WY.
 - Continue the funding for ARS/National Animal Disease Center in Ames, IA.
- Full funding for the Veterinary Services Grant Program to encourage more large animal vets.
- Continue full funding for Sustainable Agriculture Technology Development and Transfer Program.
- Support \$30 million/year funding for Farmers Market Promotion Program.

Title XII – Miscellaneous

- Continue authority for outreach and technical assistance programs for socially disadvantaged farmer and ranchers.
- Reauthorize funding for the USDA Office of Advocacy and Outreach for socially disadvantaged and veteran farmers and ranchers.
- Continue the Office of Tribal Relations to coordinate USDA activities with Native American tribes.
- Direct the Secretary to establish within FSIS a technical assistance division to provide 1) outreach, education, and training to very small or certain small establishments; and 2) timely answers to questions from very small and certain small establishments regarding inspection policy, labeling, and related technical issues that are posted for inspection program personnel and public viewing.