



STATE OF NORTH DAKOTA
DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE
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DOUG GOEHRING
COMMISSIONER

April 16, 2020

The Honorable Sonny Perdue
Secretary of Agriculture
United States Department of Agriculture
1400 Independence Avenue SW
Washington, DC 20250

Dear Mr. Secretary,

We are reaching out to you to address the state of the bison industry. We have been working with the North Dakota Bison Association, the National Bison Association and Tribal leaders to compile information on the significant disruption the bison industry has been experiencing since the pandemic took hold in the U.S. The bison industry in America has grown in recent years but remains relatively small with Tribal and private herds totaling nearly 200,000 head.

The bison industry will likely experience the lingering effects of the current market situation for another two years. The drop in the carcass price for bison has declined rapidly since the pandemic and producers and plants are struggling.

The bison industry relies on supplying the foodservice industry with high quality cuts of meat. The demand for bison in the retail industry is not for the valuable middle meats; grocery stores are more likely to stock ground bison than bison steaks. The shift to retail in grocery stores means marketers are either grinding the most valuable meats or putting them in storage. The shift in use is dropping the carcass price for young bulls and heifers thirty to fifty cents a pound.

The bison producer has also been hit by a ripple from the drop-in ethanol production. A major component of feed for bison is distillers grains and lower ethanol production is resulting in a shift to different feed sources. The feed reformulations are resulting in lower average daily gains but a 30% increase in costs. Compounding this cost situation is the additional time required to feed bison to finishing weight. Combined with a drop in prime bull or cow carcass price, the increased input costs create an unsustainable situation.

Therefore, we are proposing a market facilitation payment based on the herd inventory on February 21, 2020 and reflecting the drop in the market value of bison. The proposed payment structure that follows would represent a payment per head.

Cows/Bulls = \$210.00

Feeder Stock 400-800 lbs = \$252.00

Finished Bison 800+ lbs = \$294.00

To complement this proposal and increase opportunities, the bison industry would like to request assistance in gaining access to other programs when the nation begins to recover from the COVID-19 shutdowns. Bison is already an approved protein in the Tribal nutrition and school lunch programs. The industry would appreciate consideration of increasing that access in regions of America where a steady supply of bison can complement the protein requirements for school lunch programs.

I understand that you have conveyed to the National Bison Association your commitment to include bison producers as you assess how to best help hardworking farmers and ranchers. The recommendations above are specific steps that will help bison producers across the nation in weathering this storm.

We appreciate your consideration of this proposal.

Sincerely,



Doug Goehring

North Dakota Agriculture Commissioner

cc The Honorable Kelly Armstrong, U.S. Representative for North Dakota
The Honorable John Hoeven, U.S. Senator for North Dakota
The Honorable Kevin Cramer, U.S. Senator for North Dakota
The Honorable Doug Burgum, Governor of North Dakota