



## **National Bison Association**

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### *Bison Issues Overview, September 2022*

#### **AMS: A Vital Resource for the Bison Business**

Programs administered by the Agricultural Marketing Service (AMS) play an increasingly important role in the growth and stability of the commercial bison business. Those resources are significant, as the bison business faces the stiffest economic headwinds in the past decade.

Here is an overview of our priority issues with AMS:

#### **Section 32 Purchase Program**

The National Bison Association (NBA) greatly appreciates the facilitation of our \$17 million Section 32 bison meat purchase program. As AMS closes out that agreement, we stand ready to assist in improving the program by tailoring agreement specifications to the unique needs of the bison vendors and discussing the potential of entering into an additional agreement moving forward.

#### **Commodity Purchase Program**

Like Section 32, the NBA would like to revisit specifications for the Food Distribution Program on Indian Reservations (FDPIR) to increase participation among bison vendors and supports moving to a quarterly solicitation process for this program.

The National Bison Association, and individual bison producers, are also working with individual school districts to incorporate bison into their school menus. For example, Colorado's Boulder Valley School District serves bison to its students as a part of its Colorado Proud local sourcing effort and will serve a bison burger this week on Wednesday, "Bison Hump Day" as we call it. Expanding bison meat in Tribal schools is a high priority for the InterTribal Buffalo Council (ITBC), with whom we share a memorandum of understanding.

We also recognize that there is potential to expand the utilization of bison meat among FDPIR program clients. The Food Distribution Program Education (FDPNE) supports Tribal initiatives that expand healthy food choices among FDPIR recipients, which the NBA, in cooperation with the InterTribal Buffalo Council, is ready to assist and consult on.

## **Market Reports**

USDA's Market News Service continues to provide vital information on wholesale bison meat prices, processing figures, export statistics, and calf inventories. AMS's Sierra Pillmore has been an essential partner in this effort and has increased participation among bison marketers. The NBA has suggestions on improving the report further to increase participation and accuracy, especially in light of the recent announcement that FSA will alter its livestock indemnity process to rely more on these AMS reports in calculating values. As we have in the past, the NBA invites representatives of the Market News Service to meet with our Commercial Marketers' Committee during our association's winter conference in Denver on January 19, 2023, to discuss how to expand processor participation in that service and provide any updates while networking with constituents.

While the weaned calving report is a welcome addition to the Market News Service's bison information, the NBA recommends that the calving report distinguishes between animals held for replacements and animals scheduled for finishing.

## **AMS Grant Programs**

AMS offers a variety of valuable tools to help strengthen the marketing capabilities of producers and processors of all sizes throughout our business. For example, the Farmers Market Promotion Program grant awarded to the National Bison Association in 2016 enabled us to develop an array of resource materials that are still utilized among our direct marketers (including the free BuySome Bison app). The Regional Food Systems Grant Program is another valuable resource, particularly as the USDA supports initiatives to decentralize and strengthen the resiliency in our food processing system. Finally, any AMS programs that will be included in the forthcoming Farm Bill that benefit small, direct to market producers, such as the FMPP, are a great fit for the bison industry, and we ask that "bison" be included in an related bill language as to ensure access to bison producers, who are sometimes left out of such programs that benefit their neighbors who raise a different species of livestock.