



National Bison Association

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Bison Issues Overview: September 2022

Bison Priorities for Farm Service Agency

Livestock Indemnity Program

The National Bison Association (NBA) commends the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) Farm Service Agency (FSA) for working with our industry over the past few years to ensure that the agency's resources are available to bison producers across the United States. This inclusion is critical to our continued growth as a recognized sector of American agriculture.

We value the agency's decision to include bison losses due to *Mycoplasma bovis* in the Livestock Indemnity Program (LIP) this year. We appreciate Administrator Ducheneaux announcing this at our annual conference this past January.

We also acknowledge the commitment made by FSA in 2018 to adjust the LIP payment model for bison to assure reimbursements to bison ranchers will be on par with producers of mainstream livestock commodities. With drought conditions compounding herd health issues, access to LIP, Livestock Forage Assistance, and Emergency Livestock Assistance Program resources will help keep many producers in the business.

Beginning Producer Resources

The overall outlook for bison remains bright, despite the continued economic uncertainty that our bison producers are battling and the ongoing drought. Deliciously healthy bison meat sourced from sustainably managed herds aligns with growing consumer awareness of the connection between diet, personal health, and the well-being of our planet.

Bison ranching also represents one of the best entry points for young and beginning producers. More than 20 percent of the attendees at recent National Bison Association conferences have been people who recently entered the business or are exploring a bison career.

Many traditional agricultural lending institutions are still vastly unfamiliar with the fundamentals of bison production and, therefore, highly conservative when considering financing new bison enterprises. To that end, access to FSA resources becomes more important for those new producers.

With the pending Farm Bill on the horizon, the NBA supports the continuation of the Beginner Farmer and Rancher Loan Program and affiliate programs that support new and beginning bison producers. We also support efforts to continue educating FSA agents on the modern bison business and our role in American agriculture as a viable option.

Further, as bison herds expand in Tribal nations, USDA's resources should always support Tribal citizens in building successful bison enterprises.

Climate Smart Agriculture

The National Bison Association understands that approval for funding has been granted for the South Dakota State University Climate Smart proposal for "The Grass is Greener on the Other Side: Developing Climate-Smart Beef and Bison Commodities." The NBA is a primary partner assisting with this grant's bison focus. The five-year project will incentivize producers to utilize climate-smart management practices by providing direct premium payments for those animals. As such, we recommend equipping FSA and Natural Resource Conservation Service (NRCS) to provide technical assistance to those producers who seek assistance in developing climate-smart grazing plans, measurement tools, etc. The NBA is also submitting a proposal for the NRCS Grasslands Conservation Innovation grant to educate NRCS field agents and bison producers on the best grassland conservation and regeneration practices.

Our Recommendations to FSA and NRCS

1. Increased Access to FSA Beginning Farmer and Rancher Loans

Potential producers, including those in non-traditional bison production areas, should be provided equal access to beginning producer loans just like those applicants entering mainstream commodity production. We hope to see this program expanded in the next Farm Bill.

2. Continued Equal Access to all FSA Disaster Assistance Programs

We commend FSA for including bison losses due to *Mycoplasma bovis* in the Livestock Indemnity Program to provide bison producers with compensation that matches actual market values for 2018 and for developing a new model that will provide market-based compensation rates in the coming years. APHIS is currently accepting public comments on their proposed changes to indemnification value. Those proposed changes need to reflect bison value in current market prices.

3. Increase Understanding of Bison Production within FSA Offices

Through resources provided by a Risk Management Agency grant, the National Bison Association published the 2nd Edition of the *Bison Producers' Handbook*. This publication contains 22 chapters written by industry experts in all phases of bison production and marketing from all regions of the United States. The National Bison Association would like to provide this publication to Farm Service Centers.

4. Provide Technical Outreach to Bison Producers for Climate-Smart Agriculture

Provide the needed technical assistance and outreach to bison producers as they strive to adopt more climate-smart agricultural practices on their farms or ranches. Provide that same assistance to those project partners who will participate in the USDA-funded project on which the NBA is a partner – "The Grass is Greener on the Other Side: Developing Climate-Smart Beef and Bison Commodities".