



## National Bison Association

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# U.S. Bison Producers' Policy Priorities

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Today's bison business continues to grow despite a three-year cycle of pandemic, drought, and economic uncertainty. Bison producers, processors, and marketers across the United States have been challenged.

Last year's historic drought in the northern plain states continues to haunt areas in the north with below normal moisture. The result is partial and complete bison herd dispersals. This year drought is severely impacting bison producers in the southern plain states with similar detrimental effects. These two regions represent the largest bison-growing area in the entire world.

The bison industry faces meat processing bottlenecks across the country, which has been exacerbated by drought. As bison growers are forced to disperse their herds they bring far more animals to slaughter. Despite this, bison processing is at an all-time high. Bison continue to attract new consumers choosing to add our nutritious protein to their diets thereby increasing market share. Federal programs looking towards climate-smart solutions are finding an ally in bison. The NBA is optimistic that the 2023 Farm Bill will recognize these trends and support programming accordingly.

### **Strengthening Local Meat Processing Act - S.370 & H.R. 1258**

Sen. John Thune (R-SD) introduced the Strengthening Local Meat Processing Act on February 21, 2021, to address the persistent processing bottleneck that bison producers face across the country. A companion bill was introduced in the House on February 23, 2021 by Rep. Pingree (D-ME). This legislation would provide important tools to existing small and very small bison meat processing facilities, provide sorely needed workforce development to grow the labor force, and encourage development of more state-inspection programs.

Bison is a non-amenable species, and as such can ship its state-inspected product interstate, resulting in up to 30% of bison being processed in state-inspected plants. The NBA also sees this legislation as an opportunity to promote bison processing to existing processors as a value-added opportunity with infrastructure and training development support. The bill also allows the bison industry to potentially incorporate bison-specific processor training into training curriculums to grow the bison processor workforce.

- **NBA Request** – We ask that members of the Senate and House of Representatives support this important legislation by signing on as co-sponsors, and work to move the bill forward.

## 2023 Farm Bill

While early in the Farm Bill discussion, the NBA sees the next bill as an excellent opportunity to incorporate bison, a keystone species of America's grasslands, as a primary tool in climate-smart agriculture. The bison, our national mammal, evolved in concert with the prairie, where it continues to regenerate healthy soils and grasslands when managed correctly on farms and ranches across the nation. Bison are not immune to drought, disease and economic fluctuations. Federal government support is needed to continue to develop the resources that today's bison stewards need to grow the herd and restore the species, along with the grasslands that they graze on. The NBA requests your attention to the following areas as the Farm Bill develops:

- **Drought** – The NBA supports any emergency drought relief and related support programs. Please specifically include “bison” in any related language to ensure inclusion. The NBA also supports opening CRP lands, etc. to cutting and grazing bison as a drought mitigation and conservation tool.
- **NRCS Expansion** – The NBA supports expanded funding for NRCS and its applicable programs, which have always been a good fit for bison producers, especially EQIP. However, many NBA members have been turned away in recent years due to budget and staffing shortfalls at NRCS. Further, the NBA supports staff expansion, grazing training and support programs. Please specifically mention “bison” to ensure inclusion.
- **Processing Capacity** – The NBA supports expanding funding for small meat plant expansion programs that will support infrastructure development, workforce training, and lending support.
- **Beginning Farmers and Ranchers** – The NBA supports expanded funding of the FSA's Beginner Farmer and Rancher program. Bison, being an alternative ag endeavor, tend to attract new producers from a non-agricultural background. This program has helped many bison producers get started in the business, particularly through the program's loan fund.
- **Research** – The NBA supports the continued funding for the USDA ARS's crucial work on Malignant Catarrhal Fever and Mycoplasma bovis, both of which are lethal to bison and are both in the trial period of vaccine development.
- **Inclusion** - As mentioned, bison need to be specifically stated in Farm Bill language to ensure inclusion in all Farm Bill programs. Bison have been left out of programs in the past due to this oversight.

### Enactment of S. 2479 & H.R. 5818, the Truth in Buffalo Labeling Act

The introduction of deceptively labeled water buffalo products into the U.S. marketplace was a strong factor in sparking downward pressure on market bison prices in recent years. Some marketers of both frozen/fresh meat and pet food products, have effectively deceived their customers by marketing water buffalo in a manner that tricks customers to believe the products are American bison. Sens. John Hoeven (R-ND) and Michael Bennet (D-CO) introduced S. 2479 the Truth in Buffalo Labeling bill to stop this deceptive practice. Co-sponsors are John Thune (R-SD) Kevin Cramer (R-ND) John Tester (D-MT) Tina Smith (D-MN) Mike Braun (R-IN) and Jacky Rosen (D-NV). In the House, U.S. Reps. Ed Perlmutter (D-CO) and Billy Long (R-MO) introduced the companion bill, H.R. 5818.

- **NBA Request** – We ask that members of the Senate and House of Representatives support this important legislation by signing on as co-sponsors, and work to move the bill forward.

## **Indian Buffalo Management Act S. 3051 & HR 2074**

HR 2074, sponsored by U.S. Rep. Don Young (R-AK) and S. 3051, sponsored by Sen. Mike Rounds (R-SD): This bill establishes a permanent program within the Department of the Interior to develop and promote tribal ownership and management of buffalo and buffalo habitat on Indian lands.

Specifically, the bill requires the Department of the Interior to (1) enter into contracts, award grants, and provide technical assistance to Indian tribes and tribal organizations for activities related to buffalo restoration or management; (2) consult with tribes and tribal organizations on initiatives that affect buffalo or buffalo habitat, including efforts to contain or eradicate diseased buffalo; and (3) develop a policy relating to buffalo and buffalo habitat management activities on Tribal land. Additionally, the Department of Interior may enter into agreements with tribes or tribal organizations to transport surplus buffalo from federal land onto Indian land.

The National Bison Association has a Memorandum of Understanding with the InterTribal Buffalo Council and work to support each other's legislation, including this bill.

- **NBA Request** – We ask that members of the Senate and House of Representatives support this important legislation by signing on as co-sponsors, and working to move the bill forward.

## **National Bison Day 2022 Resolution (Senate Only)**

U.S. Sens. John Hoeven (R-ND) and Martin Heinrich (D-NM), are sponsoring a resolution to designate November 5, 2022 as National Bison Day in the United States.

Since 2012, the United States Senate annually has designated the first Saturday in November as National Bison Day. This yearly resolution is required because Senate rules do not allow for resolutions to establish any standing “National Day” on a perpetual basis. This resolution has the full support of the National Bison Association, the Wildlife Conservation Society and the InterTribal Buffalo Council. These three organizations championed the enactment of legislation in 2016 designating bison as the National Mammal of the United States.

- **NBA Request** – The National Bison Association requests Senate support this resolution. (copy attached)