



COURTESY PHOTO

Heartland Humane Society will benefit from the upcoming sale of ornamental pigs at Stockmen's Livestock in Yankton. The two black and white pigs are made of solid concrete. The retail value of each pig is \$500. Stockmen's Livestock no longer sells hogs, so they came up with the idea to donate the proceeds to the shelter. Stockmen's will auction off the ornamental pigs at the regular cattle sale at 1 p.m. Tuesday, April 27. The proceeds will go to Heartland Humane Society's Animal Fair, a fun family event to raise money for the shelter animals.

"Stockmen's Livestock has been an HHS supporter over the years," said Tasha Anderson, executive director at Heartland Humane Society. "We are so pleased that they chose us to donate to and hope to see everyone out at the sale for these unique items."

If you would like additional information about the auction, contact Anderson at 605-664-4244 or email hhs@midconetwork.com or call Stockmen's Livestock at 605-665-9641.

Senators Grassley, Conrad Introduce Green Jobs Act

WASHINGTON — Tuesday, Sens. Charles Grassley (R-Iowa) and Kent Conrad (D-N.D.) introduced The Green Renewable Energy from Ethanol Naturally Jobs Act of 2010, or the GREEN Jobs Act of 2010. Additional co-sponsors on the bill include Senators John Thune (R-S.D.), Ben Nelson (D-Neb.), Mike Johanns (R-Neb.) and Tim Johnson (D-S.D.). This legislation mirrors H.R. 4640, the Renewable Fuels Reinvestment Act, introduced by Reps. Earl Pomeroy (D-N.D.) and John Shimkus (R-Ill.) in March.

Specifically, the Senate legislation would extend the 45 cents-per-gallon ethanol blenders tax credit and the 54 cents-per-gallon ethanol import tariff for five years, to the end of 2015. Both provisions are slated to expire at the end of this year. The bill would also extend the \$1.01 per gallon cellulosic ethanol production tax credit until the end of 2015.

According to recent reports by the Renewable Fuels Association (RFA) and Growth Energy, if the ethanol blenders

credit is not extended, thousands of jobs directly involved with the ethanol industry — a majority of them in rural America — would be lost due to a lowered demand for ethanol. These studies show domestic ethanol production would decrease by roughly 4 billion gallons, which is equivalent to closing two out of every five ethanol plants operating today. His would also potentially lower corn prices by roughly 8 percent, \$0.30 per bushel, due to lower demand.

According to the RFA, in 2009, the ethanol industry returned \$3.4 billion to the federal treasury than the cost of the ethanol blenders tax credit.

Supporters of the bill contend that removal of the secondary tariff on foreign-produced ethanol would result in increased dependence on imported fuels. And if the secondary tariff is not extended, 28 states would see drastic economic loss, including Iowa, Illinois, Nebraska, Minnesota, Indiana and South Dakota.

Report Calls For Mandatory Reduction Of Salt In Food

BY TONY PUGH
McClatchy Newspapers

WASHINGTON — America's long and dangerous love affair with salty food may be coming to an end.

After more than 40 years of failed efforts to reduce salt in processed and restaurant food voluntarily, a new report calls on the Food and Drug Administration to establish mandatory standards that gradually reduce sodium content in the nation's food supply.

The report by the Institute of Medicine recommends that the FDA, working with the food industry, limit the amount of salt that restaurants, food manufacturers and food service companies could add to their products.

In a statement, the FDA said it hadn't decided whether to move on the report.

"Over the coming weeks, the FDA will more thoroughly review the recommendations of the IOM report and build plans for how the FDA can continue to work with other federal agencies, public health and consumer groups and the food industry to support the reduction of sodium levels in the food supply," the statement said.

"The Department of Health and Human Services will be establishing an interagency working group on sodium at the department that will review options and next steps."

Health officials say it's a matter of life and death. Eating too much salt can lead to hypertension, or high blood pressure, which is a major risk factor for heart disease, kidney failure and stroke. One in three U.S. adults — nearly 75 million people 20 or older — suffer from

hypertension, and another 50 million adults suffer from pre-hypertension.

"The vast majority of the U.S. population is consuming sodium at levels that are simply too high to be safe," said Jane E. Henney, a professor of medicine at the University of Cincinnati and the chair of the Institute of Medicine committee that authored the report. "This is an urgent public health problem."

About 88 percent of the U.S. population age 2 and older consumes more sodium each day than is recommended. On average, Americans ingest about 3,400 milligrams of sodium each day, or about 1.5 teaspoons of salt. Experts have said they should consume no more than 2,300 milligrams, or 1 teaspoon a day. People older than 50 should ingest even less.

However, lowering daily sodium intake even further, to 1,500 milligrams, would prevent more than 100,000 deaths a year and save billions in medical costs, Henney said.

The new recommendations would reduce sodium content and consumption incrementally without sacrificing flavor that consumers love. If it's done correctly over the course of several years, most people won't even notice the change in their diets, Henney said. Under the Institute of Medicine plan, acceptable sodium levels set by the FDA would vary by food groups such as meats, breads and grains, beverages, soups and condiments.

Since most dietary salt is consumed through prepared meals and processed or packaged foods, the recommendations are directed at food manufacturers and food-preparation industries.

The report calls for increasing FDA staff and

funding to implement the changes and monitor compliance with the new initiative.

"The committee recommends that the FDA expeditiously begin the process of gathering information and initiating action on the proposal," Henney said.

The Grocery Manufacturers Association, which represents the world's leading food and beverage companies, applauded the proposal and said the food industry had been working for several years to reduce sodium in products and provide consumers with healthier food choices. In a statement, the group said, "We look forward to working with the U.S. Food and Drug Administration to develop a national sodium reduction strategy that will help consumers."

The National Restaurant Association praised the proposal's incremental approach, saying consumers would suffer if drastic recipe changes were mandated quickly. "Without customer acceptance, there will be no measurable change in consumer behavior," said Scott DeFife, the association's executive vice president.

Lori Roman, the president of the Salt Institute, which represents salt producers, bashed the proposal, however, saying it ignored the medical benefits of salt for some people. Roman said the FDA should conduct clinical trials before implementing the plan.

"They're talking about limiting sodium for an entire population and there's no clinical evidence to support that, and they have refused to do randomized clinical trials to get the support and scientific evidence they would need to take such drastic measures," Roman said.

COOP

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as friends. And the customers reciprocate. Carolyn told about how customers would send coffee home with her husband to keep him awake on the road, and how they would call the farm late at night to make sure he got home okay if the road conditions were poor.

An example of how North Star Neighbors worked with its customers is when Knopik was considering taking his cattle off mineral, a supplement that is usually thought of as routine in cattle production.

"We were communicating with our customers about their health problems," Knopik said. "Someone would have a food allergy or sensitivity that was traced back to what the calves ate. This was years before science even began looking at this possibility. This was 15, 20 years ago. We were long accused of making unsubstantiated claims that research is now showing to be true."

North Star Neighbors made the final decision to eliminate the mineral when Mad Cow disease was of particular concern, especially since one of the common components at the time was tied to the pathogen behind this human health worry. At the same time, Knopik had four cows die from choking on turnips, and in talking with other producers, it was suspected that the cows had overdosed on the dicalcium phosphate component of the mineral.

Taking away the mineral was a leap of faith, but one that has paid off. Carolyn noted how the cattle have seemed gentler ever since, but what is more important is the effect on their customers: "Some said their child

can eat beef again when he could never eat beef before."

Soon after, North Star also took out hormones, feed additives, and antibiotics. The result has been happier customers — and, surprisingly, healthier animals.

"We have come to believe that stress is the cause of most sickness," Knopik said, so if a producer is able to reduce the stress on the animal, which includes not feeding additives that are unnaturally compatible to the animal's system, he can avoid many of the illnesses conventional producers deal with.

CHANGES IN THE WORKS

Another production change in the works, based on joint interest from the cooperative's customers and producers, is moving toward grass-finishing for the beef operation. Grass-finished beef is known for its nutritional benefits, and with the high cost of feed, it's good for the producer, too.

North Star Neighbors has been mob grazing for a year and a half, and is estimating needing another year and a half until the cooperative can convert fully to grass finishing. So far, mob grazing has allowed North Star Neighbors to graze up to eight months out of the year and increase the number of head by 25 percent. Knopik and his son, Tom, currently have 200 cows, plus their calves, 75 yearlings, and 50 yearling heifers — and have plans to increase the herd by another 10 percent. The majority of their 1,600-plus acres is pasture, and more cropland is being converted.

"Mob grazing worked so well last year that we didn't even use 320 acres," Knopik said. "It's more about feeding the land than it is about feeding the cows."

The goal is to get to year-round grazing, something that

he estimates will take another three to five years. Currently, the four months that their herd doesn't graze here, they graze rented corn stalks.

"All the farmers around here think mob grazing is too much work. It does take a lot of work to get there, the point of being able to do this, with fencing and making sure the water is where it needs to be," Knopik said. "What they don't realize is that instead of eight herds, they're only running one and it takes a half hour to move them is all. We can also eliminate having to haul them everywhere; they can be moved from one field to the next without using fossil fuels."

There are some less apparent benefits, as well: "They are easy to keep in, too, because every day, they're in a new place, so it's like candy to them," Knopik said. "And they eat weeds and brush: in fact, the longer they mob graze, the more we find they actually prefer weeds — they're higher in protein than grass. Long-time mob grazers worry about how to keep their weeds!"

SHARED PASSION DRIVES COOPERATIVE

The number-one tip that Knopik can offer about making a cooperative successful is to find producers who share the same passion and philosophies about farming and life.

"You have to have people who believe in the same things you believe in," he said. "We can't have people going off in different directions."

Planning is good, but the focus is what's more important: "Everybody believes you have to have a business plan and feasibility studies, and I suppose, but we've changed so much that if we had stuck to a business plan, we would've missed a lot of opportunities," Knopik said. "Every year, we change our plan

and adjust. If we had relied on all our customers coming to the farm, we couldn't have survived as a business. If we had stayed at the farmers markets, we would've burned out."

"The most important thing is to develop a mission statement and goals," he added. "You can go outside the straight line, but you always have to come back."

NEBRASKA FOOD COOP

North Star Neighbors is also a pick-up point for the Nebraska Food Coop, an Internet-based marketplace that bears a lot of resemblance to the North Star Neighbors business model. In fact, Knopik is a co-founder of this innovative virtual cooperative that has since been replicated in other states.

The Nebraska Food Coop shares the same philosophy as North Star Neighbors, as an economically, socially, and environmentally sustainable network of producers and consumers. The volunteer-run cooperative consists of a web-based marketplace, www.nebraskafood.org, where member consumers can buy products from member producers. The producers then work together to deliver their products to specified pick-up points.

The Nebraska Food Coop is more than providing a place for consumers to purchase local foods and for producers to sell their products locally. It's about creating a viable local food infrastructure. Knopik said the infrastructure is expanding — the delivery system now includes the eastern third of the state and an additional hub is being established in Kearney, and processors are being added to the mix such as a mobile meat processing unit that will be built in about three weeks — as is the product diversity.

"People can be more independent," Knopik said. "They

don't all have to be organic or raise broilers or sell meat. They don't all have to be a certain size producer. I'd like to get to the point where the little, old lady down the street can sell a couple quarts of strawberries and be profitable."

One goal is that the Nebraska Food Coop will get to the point of sustaining itself, giving up volunteer hours — that any point, whether the delivery or the processing part, can grow enough for someone to make a business out of it.

"For example, we need a packaging facility now, so there's a job available," Knopik said. "We (Nebraska Food Coop) don't want to own everything. That's getting too close to vertical integration. We want to open avenues for new marketers and new businesses."

THE NEXT GENERATION

This year, two of Knopik's granddaughters and a grandson are starting their own egg business, utilizing the Nebraska Food Coop. Another grandson is trying out eco-tourism by renting out camping units in the pasture.

"It's such a good learning process for them to learn how to market their stuff," Knopik said. "I think that's why we (the agricultural industry in general) lose so many farmers — because they've lost the knowledge and means of how to market."

The cooperative model brings this back into production agriculture, and while it's a challenge for many producers, marketing is what makes the profession viable and sustainable.

"If you're working hard, why shouldn't you be entitled to live like the average of society does?" Knopik asked.

"People can be more independent," Knopik said. "They

AGNOTES

Natural Resources Day In Nebraska Set

LINCOLN, Neb. — When it comes to the environment, it is often a subject that can lead to controversy and discord. But in Nebraska, conserving natural resources has been a partnership effort for the past 75 years.

On April 7, Gov. Dave Heineman signed a proclamation recognizing Nebraska's successful conservation partnership effort. The governor declared April 27, 2010, "Natural Resources Conservation Day" in recognition of the 75th anniversary date of the passage of the U.S. Soil Conservation Act, which created the USDA's Soil Conservation Service (SCS).

The SCS has since evolved into the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS). The name may have changed, but the mission of the Agency has remained the same since its inception — to help people help the land.

NRCS is the primary federal agency that works on privately owned land. NRCS assists landowners and Tribes with the conservation of natural resources.

Conservation programs are available through the agency that provide financial and technical assistance to enhance or install conservation practices.

Steve Chick, state conservationist for NRCS in Nebraska, has been with the agency for more than 30 years. During that time he has seen landowners meet several challenges.

"In the 1970s, when I first began my career, the mantra of the day was to 'plant fence-row to fence-row.' We saw windbreaks cut down, field borders torn out, and some even planted into the right of way of the roads."

"Later on, in the 1980s and '90s, we saw the pendulum swing back towards conservation — like installing terraces, filter strips, no-till, windbreaks, wetland restoration, and more. NRCS worked hard with landowners and Tribes to not only improve their land, but to also help make their farming and ranching operations more profitable and sustainable," Chick said.

NRCS has had a big impact on the Nation's natural resources. During the past 75 years, NRCS has helped install more than 15 million miles of terraces, plant more than 20 million acres of trees, and establish more than 160 million acres of wildlife habitat.

NRCS has had a tremendous impact in Nebraska as well. This has been accomplished through a highly successful partnership between individual landowners, tribal members, private organizations, and state and federal agencies.

One of the agency's closest partners has been Nebraska's Natural Resources Districts (NRDs). Conservation districts were also formed in the mid 1930s. The NRD/NRCS partnership has evolved and grown together during the past 75 years, with each agency bringing unique skills and tools to the table.

Dean Edson, executive director of the Nebraska Association of Resources Districts, said, "Nebraska's Natural Resources Districts (NRDs) are proud to partner with NRCS to protect and conserve Nebraska's natural resources for current and future generations. Nebraska's NRDs have had a long working partnership with NRCS to implement soil and water conservation programs for landowners to help protect the natural resources for generations to come."

According to Chick, what NRCS and its partners are accomplishing by working together is all about the future, and he is excited about what he sees.

"I think the future is bright for natural resources conservation. There are many more opportunities available to landowners — like organic farming and installing green energy practices on their land. I'm sure these are things my colleagues 75 years ago would have never imagined, but I'm excited to think about what another 75 years may bring," Chick said.

For more information about NRCS, the history of agency, and the partnership effort in Nebraska, visit www.ne.nrcs.usda.gov.

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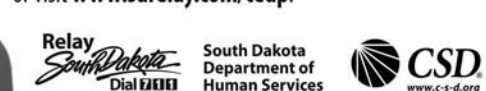
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