

Tour

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work in these plants, who rely on lean beef processing and who raise cattle,” he said. “We have this kind of hysteria where it damages businesses and good, hard-working people.”

BPI has already sustained much damage, Michels said. “It’s heart-wrenching, through no fault of your own, that you are (a BPI employee) working hard and putting out a good product, and here people are losing their jobs because of misinformation,” he said.

The Nebraska plant remains open, but more than 650 workers in Kansas, Texas and Iowa have been temporarily laid off. According to the National Meat Association, as many as 3,000 American jobs will be affected when suppliers are also factored into the situation.

The LFTB process has been used safely for decades, Michels said.

“We want to make it very clear that this is a product that has been produced by BPI for 20-plus years,” he said. “They have received numerous food safety awards from the USDA, and no one has ever been sick, no one has been injured and no one has died from consuming this lean, finely-textured beef product.”

PUTTING THE PLAN IN ACTION

Michels said he briefed Gov. Dennis Daugaard this week upon the governor’s arrival home from a trade mission to China. Daugaard is also working with his policy analyst, Nathan Sanderson, on the next course of action, Michels said.

A continued multi-state approach, as was shown last week in South Sioux City, remains crucial, the lieutenant governor said.

“Our economy doesn’t start and stop at the border,” he said. “I do think this (effort) is based on relationships, and the governor and I have good relationships with Gov. (Terry) Branstad of Iowa, Gov. (Dave) Heineman and Lt. Gov. (Rick) Sheehy of Nebraska, and our other neighbors. Kudos go out to Gov. Branstad for organizing (last week’s tour and press conference).”

Nebraska Agriculture Director Greg Ibach, who toured IBP with Sheehy, issued a statement afterwards.

“Lean, finely-textured beef is beef, plain and simple, and its production involves science-based processes that promote food safety,” he said. “Beef production in Nebraska is an important part of our economy, from farm to fork. Nebraska’s farmers, ranchers and agribusinesses take great pride in raising quality beef for consumers around the world.”

Ibach, currently leading an agriculture mission to South Korea, told the *Press & Dakotan* in an email that his state has already launched an effort to counter misinformation about LFTB. Sheehy appeared Wednesday on a morning radio show in Lincoln, sharing what he learned during the BPI tour.

“We will continue to provide factual information on the subject at any opportunity we have,” Ibach said.

In his email to the *Press & Dakotan*, Ibach said he believes the general public will continue purchasing the meat.

“I am confident that, once consumers have correct information, they will continue to enjoy ground beef in their diets, including ground beef that includes LFTB,” he said. “It is an affordable protein staple for many households.”

Last week’s tour of the South Sioux City plant wasn’t Michels’ first meeting with BPI founder-president Eldon Roth and his wife, Regina. The lieutenant governor met the Roths during last

year’s flood fight efforts in southeast South Dakota. Eldon Roth explained the LFTB process to Michels, who saw the procedure in action during last week’s tour.

“A lot of people, in their minds, with any sort of manufacturing plant, think of things like the old movies with their slaughterhouses,” Michels said. “Nothing could be further from the truth (with BPI). It was very modern technically. There was the professionalism and the mechanized use for those products. It was nothing short of impressive.”

The officials taking the tour also learned about the puff of ammonium hydroxide gas added to kill bacteria, Michels said.

“A doctor from Texas A&M came up with its use,” he said of the process. “It makes the product even more safe by killing any E. Coli. Ammonia is naturally occurring, and there is more ammonia in our own colons than in this (LFTB) product. There is more ammonia in the bun than the meat itself.”

Michels said he welcomes USDA scrutiny of the meat supply and other ag products as part of food safety.

“Everybody should understand that there are risks in life. We do get notices periodically on E. Coli (and salmonella). That’s why we have the USDA surveillance. We all want to know what we are putting in our body,” he

said. “But in the reverse, it’s important that we are battling misinformation that’s maligning an industry.”

BUILDING FOR THE FUTURE

During last week’s news conference in South Sioux City, a reporter asked the governors and officials if they were attending the tour because the Roths had made campaign contributions. Michels noted the question drew an angry response from Branstad.

When asked twice by the *Press & Dakotan* during this week’s interview, Michels said he didn’t know if the Roths or BPI made contributions to the Dau-

gaard-Michels campaign.

“No. 1, (the issue of donors is) irrelevant to the whole story. That’s not it at all,” Michels said. “This (support for BPI) has to do with jobs. In South Dakota, BPI has 161 jobs that are at risk.”

Campaign contributions don’t control the Daugaard administration’s actions or decisions, Michels said.

“We value our integrity,”

Michels said. “The governor and I have taken stands against our donors.”

The bottom line is getting BPI sales back on track, re-opening the closed plants and bolstering the livestock market, Michels said.

Ibach said he remains confident the beef industry will come through the current difficult period with the LFTB.

“There are plenty of challenges for the industry, but I think there are as many or more opportunities,” he said. “Nebraska raises great quality beef from farm to fork because we have such a strong processing sector.”

Michels encourages retailers and consumers to continue using LFTB and to enjoy the barbecue season.

“Everybody needs to chill and grill,” he said.

Kony

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place.

“I’m really very happy to let you know that life in northern Uganda has changed,” he said. “It’s no longer the way it was in this movie ... There is peace.”

While the rebels have left Uganda, they are still abducting and killing children in other parts of central Africa, including southern Sudan and the Democratic Republic of Congo, Lawrence said. He encouraged those in the audience to help end the conflict in these areas by helping spread awareness of the movement and by contacting policymakers.

“We need your voice,” he said. “We know how powerful your voice is to have this war stopped.”

The organization also gave the students cards to pledge their support for the cause. The pledge cards will be sent to legislators to show there is support to arrest Kony and end the armed conflict in central Africa.

“We believe we can end it this year, and we need your help to do it,” Williams said.

For more information, visit www.invisiblechildren.com.

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