

Farm Labor Decision

Child Labor Groups Chide Ruling

BY SAM HANANEL
Associated Press

WASHINGTON — Child labor groups say they are stunned and disappointed that the Obama administration is backing off a plan to keep children from doing the most dangerous farm jobs.

Reid Maki, coordinator of the Child Labor Coalition, said the Labor Department's sudden decision late Thursday to withdraw the proposed rules means more children will die in farm accidents that could have been prevented.

"There was tremendous heat and I don't think it helped that it was an election year," he said. "A lot of conservatives made a lot of political hay out of this issue."

Under pressure from farm groups and lawmakers from rural states, the Labor Department said it is withdrawing proposed rules that would ban children younger than 16 from using most power-driven farm equipment, including tractors. The rules also would prevent those younger than 18 from working in feed lots, grain silos and stockyards.

The plan specifically excluded children who work on their parents' farms. But the proposal still became a popular political target for Republicans

who called it an impractical, heavy-handed regulation that ignored the reality of small farms.

"It's good the Labor Department rethought the ridiculous regulations it was going to stick on farmers and their families," said Sen. Chuck Grassley, R-Iowa. "To even propose such regulations defies common sense, and shows a real lack of understanding as to how the family farm works."

The surprise move comes just two months after the Labor Department modified the rule in a bid to satisfy opponents. The agency made clear it would exempt children who worked on farms owned or operated by their parents, even if the ownership was part of a complex partnership or corporate agreement.

That didn't appease farm groups like the American Farm Bureau Federation that complained it would upset traditions in which many children work on farms owned by uncles, grandparents and other relatives to reduce costs and learn how a farm operates. The Labor Department said Thursday it was responding to thousands of comments that expressed concern about the impact of the changes on small family-owned farms.

"The Obama administration is firmly committed to promoting family farmers and respecting the rural way of life, especially the role that par-

ents and other family members play in passing those traditions down through the generations," the agency said in a statement.

The agency said it would work with rural stakeholders, including the Farm Bureau, the National Farmers Union and 4-H to develop an educational program to reduce accidents to young workers.

Sen. Jon Tester, D-Mont., a grain farmer known to till his fields on weekends away from Washington, had come out strongly against the proposed rule. The Democrat continued to criticize the Obama administration rule even after it was tempered earlier this year, saying the Labor Department "clearly didn't get the whole message" from Montana's farmers and ranchers.

Tester, who is in a tough race for re-election, praised the decision to withdraw the rule and said he would fight "any measure that threatens that heritage and our rural way of life."

The move disappointed child safety groups who said the rules represent long-overdue protections for children working for hire in farm communities. Three-quarters of working children under 16 who died of work-related injuries in 2010 were in agriculture, according to the Child Labor Coalition.

Experts: BSE Case Is No Cause For Alarm

BROOKINGS — South Dakotans need not react with fear when eating beef, says Dr. Russ Daly, South Dakota State Public Health Veterinarian, in response to the recent Bovine Spongiform Encephalopathy (BSE) case discovered in California.

"Because of restrictions put into place in the early 2000s, there is nothing to worry about from a food safety perspective," said Daly, who also serves as the SDSU Extension Veterinarian. "Even in the extremely rare event an animal is affected with BSE, there are only certain portions of a carcass that carry the infection. Those portions, such as brain and spinal cord, have been eliminated from the human and animal food chain for more than decade now."

State Veterinarian, Dr. Dustin Oedekoven, echoes Daly's confidence. In an April 25 release from the South Dakota Animal Industry Board, Oedekoven explains that the finding of this atypical BSE case is similar to those spontaneous cases identified in 2005 in Texas and 2006 in Alabama, and is no reason for concern because atypical BSE is not a contagious disease and is not known to be associated with contaminated livestock feed, as is the case with classical BSE.

"It is important to know that this animal did not enter the food or feed supply," Dr. Oedekoven said. "The U.S. beef supply is safe, and this finding has no impact on the health of the nation's cattle herd. The surveillance system in place is working."

He adds that an announcement from USDA suggests that this finding will not affect the United States' BSE status, as determined by the World Organization for Animal Health, also known as OIE.

This is reassuring news for South Dakota consumers and cattle producers, says Keith Underwood, the SDSU Extension meat specialist.

"It's important to know that the USDA and the meat industry as a whole, have been vigilant to ensure that portions of the carcass which may contain BSE are removed, at risk animals are tested, and animals that have this disease do not enter the food chain," Underwood said. "The system works and this shows that the U.S. beef supply is safe."

SDSU: Breed Heifers 2-4 Weeks Before Cows

BROOKINGS — Even though calving season is not yet done for most producers, it's not too soon to begin planning for breeding of open heifers, says George Perry, South Dakota State University associate professor and SDSU Extension Beef Reproduction Specialist during a recent iGrow Radio Network interview.

Perry says it's a good idea to breed heifers to calve two to four weeks ahead of the main cow herd, to give the heifers' time to recover before cycling back for the second breeding season.

"We really need to think about getting heifers bred, before we finish calving or think about breeding our cows," Perry said.

He says there are several estrus synchronization programs to help get the heifers bred in a timely manner. He lists the three main estrus synchronization programs recommended for beef heifers including: simple estrus detection, estrus detection with timed AI and fixed-timed AI protocols.

Perry says producers can locate an Online estrus planner by visiting <http://igrow.org/livestock/beef/> and clicking on 'Links' under the Resource Library. Perry encourages livestock growers to choose a protocol that fits their time, facilities and experience.

"By using any of these protocols you can better manage your time in that you know you want to detect estrus for this three to five day period or you're going to go out and do a fixed-time AI on them," Perry said. "Synchronization really becomes a management tool that benefits you in managing your labor also."

Planting Grain Sorghum Has Many Benefits

BROOKINGS — Dryland farmers in South Dakota may benefit from planting grain sorghum this season, says John Rickertsen, SDSU Extension Agronomy Field Specialist.

"Grain sorghum is much more adaptable to dry conditions than corn," said Rickertsen, of the crop also known as milo.

Not only is grain sorghum more drought tolerant than corn hybrids, but Rickertsen says the grass species is a more economical option than corn for most dryland farmers in central and western South Dakota.

"The further west we move we become more cost-conscious because there isn't the corn production out here that there is along the I-29 corridor. Seeding costs of grain sorghum are significantly lower because the seed costs less and a bag of sorghum seed will plant 10 to 15 acres versus 3 to 4 for corn," Rickertsen said.

He adds that some years, milo markets are equal to, or greater than corn.

"Milo, like corn is mainly used as a feed grain, however, in South Dakota it's also sold into the bird seed market, which is why prices are sometimes better than corn."

Introduce grain sorghum into wheat rotation

Grain sorghum is an easy crop to introduce into a wheat rotation. The crop can be planted utilizing a conventional drill or row crop planter. When it comes time to harvest, Rickertsen says wheat farmers can use their conventional header.

"For wheat farmers there, they can add milo to the rotation without buying new equipment," he said.

He adds that weed control is yet another benefit to planting grain sorghum.

"There is a huge advantage that comes with adding a warm season grass, like milo, to the rotation. It provides a great opportunity to control those early season weeds like cheatgrass," Rickertsen said.

Grain sorghum also promotes mychorizae production in the soil.

"Mychorizae are small fungi that attach to the plant's root hairs and enhance the absorption of nutrients and water," he said.

Although grain sorghum is similar to corn in its nutrient requirements, unlike corn, grain sorghum does not do well if it's planted in cool soil. Rickertsen recommends waiting until soil temperatures reach 60 degrees.

New Study Finds Organic Farming Can Sow Efficiency, Too

BY AMINA KHAN
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Organic agriculture generally comes at a cost of smaller harvests compared with conventional agriculture, but that gap can be narrowed with careful selection of crop type, growing conditions and management techniques, according a new study.

Organic farming has been touted by supporters as a more environmentally sustainable method of farming that's better for consumers because crops contain fewer man-made chemicals. But without the high-nitrogen fertilizers and pesticides often employed in conventional agriculture, it's also less efficient.

"The organic-versus-conventional debate is very emotional, very heated, and it's not really informed sufficiently by scientific evidence," said Verena Seufert, a geographer at McGill University in Montreal and lead author of the study published online Wednesday by the journal Nature.

To take a hard look at the data, Seufert and her colleagues collected 66 published papers comparing organic and conventional yields for 34 crop species, including wheat, tomatoes and soybeans. They focused on studies that tested growing systems that were truly organic — meaning they rotated crops to allow the soil's nutrients to be replenished, used organic fertilizers and employed insects instead of chemicals to keep pests in check. Altogether, the analysis included



316 head-to-head comparisons.

Overall, the team found that yields from organic farming in developed countries were 20 percent lower than when farmers used conventional methods. When the researchers expanded the analysis to include developing countries, the gap widened to 25 percent.

At first blush, most farmers would consider that unacceptable, said Michel Cavigelli, a soil scientist with the U.S. Department of Agriculture in Beltsville, Md., who was not involved in the study.

But after considering how much more research has gone into conventional agriculture compared with organic, he added, the results are more impressive.

"There's a lot of potential here

with organic agriculture," Cavigelli said. "We need to improve the systems."

In fact, in cases in which growers used techniques that are considered to be the best practices for organic farming, the gap between organic and conventional yields narrowed to 13 percent.

"If you do things as well as you can, then the yield difference is very small," Cavigelli said.

Some crop yields didn't suffer much by following organic practices, the study found. Organic fruits such as strawberries and apples saw just a 3 percent difference, and oilseed crops followed just 11 percent behind their conventionally grown counterparts. Yields for organic cereals, however, were 26 per-

cent lower, and organic vegetables lagged behind by 33 percent.

Nitrogen typically can't be taken up by plants until it's processed by soil microbes. For fast-growing annuals and other crops, this can be a problem — one often fixed by augmenting the soil with chemical fertilizers.

Legumes, however, can pull much of their nitrogen from the air, and perennials grow slower and can stay in step with nitrogen's gradual release. So yields for these types of crops — including soybeans and tree fruits — were only 5 percent lower when grown organically instead of conventionally, the researchers reported.

As for settling the question of which system is better, the findings don't provide a black-and-white answer, Cavigelli said.

Organic proponents are sure to be disappointed with the size of the overall gap, and many conventional farmers still won't see the practicality of foregoing chemical fertilizers and pesticides.

John Reganold, a Washington State University agroecologist who was not involved in the study, agreed.

"People think organic is not going to feed the world," Reganold said, whose own research has found that organically grown strawberries contain more nutrients than their conventionally grown counterparts. "Well guess what? No one farming system's going to feed the planet. It's going to take a blend to guarantee us global food security."

SDSU Extension Hosting Wheat Walk Event Near Mitchell

BROOKINGS — SDSU Extension will host a Wheat Walks in the Mitchell area May 15.

Morning sessions begin at 9 a.m. and go to 11 a.m. Central Daylight Time (CDT) and afternoon sessions run from 3 p.m. to 5 p.m. CDT. Three or more SDSU Extension Agronomy Field Specialists and State Specialists will be on hand at each location, representing the specialty areas of Plant Pathology, Weeds, Entomology, Soil Fertility and Cropping Systems.

Each specialist will give a brief presentation, followed by time for

discussion and answering questions. Those attending are encouraged to bring samples from their fields for the agronomists to assess. CCA credits have been applied for.

Directions to the Mitchell session are: From the intersection of S.D. Highway 37 and 252nd Ave. (Cemetery Rd) at the north end of Mitchell, 4 miles west to 405th St. and 3 miles north. Or from I-90 exit 325 (Betts Rd), 2.5 miles north, 2 miles east, 3 miles north.


Registration for the walks is \$25 and \$15 for each additional person

attending from the same farming operation. To pre-register, send checks payable to "SDSU Extension" to SDSU Extension Center, Box 270, Winner, SD 57580.

Registrations will also be accepted at each Wheat Walk location the day of the event. Each \$25 registrant will receive several Ex-

tension wheat publications, including the newly printed "iGrow Wheat — Best Management Practices for Wheat Production in South Dakota," a \$59 value.

For more information, visit <http://igrow.org/> and check the calendar and upcoming events or call 842-1267.



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Board Certified Otolaryngologist



Catherine A. Wright, M.D.
Board Certified Otolaryngologist



Todd A. Farnham, Au.D., CCC-A



Beth J. Beeman, Au.D., CCC-A