

AGNOTES

Cattlemen Coalition Considering Litigation Against NCBA

LINCOLN, Neb. —The Organization for Competitive Markets is actively exploring litigation as the best option for addressing the recently disclosed misappropriation of beef checkoff funds by NCBA. During a routine compliance review of NCBA, ordered by the Cattlemen's Beef Board, strong evidence of mishandling of checkoff funds was uncovered. A one percent sampling by the accounting firm Clifton Gunderson found a disturbing level of misuse of the checkoff funds.

OCM Board members were angered by these findings. Members of the organization have long viewed NCBA as an instrument of meat packers rather than the advocate for the interests of beef cattle producers it purports to be. At its regularly scheduled OCM board meeting on August 19th, the vote was unanimous to actively pursue litigation to ensure a detailed and comprehensive audit of the entire fourteen years NCBA has been a contractor for the cattlemen's checkoff.

OCM President, Randy Stevenson said, "The law requires that all cattle producers pay the checkoff, regardless of how they feel about the NCBA or their use of these funds. By government mandate, checkoff funds are to be used to promote beef and not the interests of meat packers. Now we find that NCBA has not only failed in its fiduciary responsibility but has betrayed the trust of cattlemen who fund the program. We want a thorough investigation and complete audit, and every misappropriated dollar returned to the Cattlemen's Beef Board."

Beef Producers Workshop Set For Tuesday, Aug. 31

BROOKINGS—The South Dakota Cooperative Extension Service will host an educational meeting for beef producers on Aug. 31 near Beresford.

The meeting starts at 4 p.m. at the South Dakota Agricultural Experiment Station's Southeast Research Farm, located 6 miles west and 3 miles south of Beresford. Burgers and chips will be served at the meeting's conclusion and there is a \$3 fee for the meal. Pre-registration by noon on Aug. 30 is required. To register, call the Lincoln County Extension office at 605-764-2756.

Featured speakers include Extension Veterinarian Russ Daly, Extension Beef Specialist Cody Wright, Extension Feedlot Specialist Ben Holland, and Extension Livestock Educators Jeff Lounsbury and John Keimig.

The speakers will address topics including early weaning management, proper vaccine handling and effective vaccination methods, health considerations for calves and yearlings going into feedlots, starting calves and yearlings on feed, step-up rations, ration considerations for newly weaned calves, utilization of distillers products in rations, and bunk management. The meeting is set to end at approximately 8 p.m.

The South Dakota Cooperative Extension Service and the South Dakota Agricultural Experiment Station's Southeast Research Farm are sponsoring the event. It is open to anyone interested in the topics on the agenda.

Winter Wheat Seed Testing For Scab Is Recommended

BROOKINGS — Winter wheat seed testing is recommended this year. Unfortunately, some scab is showing up in the samples at the SDSU Seed Testing Lab. A germination test is recommended if planting seed has some scab infection present.

The lab is also offering a treated germination test on request. The lab will apply a fungicide to a portion of submitted samples, and run a treated germ to determine if a fungicide application has the potential to help seed germination and to meet certification standards. This test will reveal if a fungicide application is an option for the seed lot. The lab recommends an untreated germination test as well as the treated germination test to scabby lots to get a better picture of wheat quality.

Figuring Great Lakes' Role In Climate Change

BY DEIRDRE LOCKWOOD
McClatchy News Service

CHICAGO — If you've taken the high-speed ferry across Lake Michigan between Milwaukee and Muskegon, Mich., in the past few years, you've been part of an experiment.

As the ferry makes its 2 1/2-hour trip across the lake, a device in the engine room measures carbon dioxide dissolved in the surface of the lake, and another sensor on top of the ferry tracks it in the air.

Harvey Bootsma, a researcher at University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, has been using the Lake Express ferry as a mobile laboratory since 2006 to tackle an unresolved question: Do the Great Lakes soak up carbon dioxide from the atmosphere, the way forests do? Or do they behave "like we do," as Bootsma puts it, by exhaling it?

Finding the answer would not only shed light on the lakes' ecosystems but also contribute to our understanding of climate change. Scientists say carbon dioxide released through fossil fuel burning contributes to global warming. Carbon sinks — vast natural structures like forests and oceans — can slow the buildup by absorbing carbon dioxide from the air.

The Great Lakes are complex enough that Galen McKinley, assistant professor of atmospheric and oceanic sciences at University of Wisconsin-Madison, calls them "small oceans as opposed to big lakes." Yet they are not yet part of current models estimating the impact of natural carbon sources and sinks in the United States.

"They're significant enough on a regional basis that they should be included in the budget to see what can safely be emitted by humans," said Noel Urban, professor of civil and environmental engineering at Michigan Technological University.

The challenge is that the lakes are vast — they account for 20 percent of the world's available freshwater, and 90 percent of that in the U.S. The biological processes that control their carbon diox-

ide dynamics change from the shore to the open lake, as well as through the seasons. Invasive species and climate change, meanwhile, are changing them from year to year.

To understand the lakes' role as carbon sources or sinks, researchers must study them throughout the year, in as many places as possible. That is expensive to do by traditional shipboard sampling, and ice-in ports also have kept scientists from measuring the lakes in winter.

"Here's something right in our backyard and yet we don't know what's going on out there for half the year," Urban said.

Bootsma's ferry-based system, which plies the lake from May through October, has helped him solve part of the puzzle. In summer, the ferry crosses the lake six times a day. In addition to carbon dioxide, it measures temperature, dissolved oxygen and chlorophyll fluorescence, which indicates the concentration of algae growing in the water.

"It has really improved our insights into the carbon dioxide dynamics of Lake Michigan," Bootsma said. "There is no way we could collect this type of data using conventional research ships."

This is the first time a volunteer observation ship has measured carbon dioxide on the Great Lakes, although oceanographers at the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration have outfitted container ships with similar equipment to study the oceans.

Bootsma has also installed an automated buoy about a half-mile off Atwater Beach in the village of Shorewood, Wis., near Milwaukee, to study carbon dioxide closer to shore. The buoy has a weather station on top, and every hour it makes the same measurements as the ferry system, as well as for conductivity, pH level and the water's cloudiness, or turbidity.

So far, Bootsma has found that from late spring through October, Lake Michigan is a sink for carbon, as algae use the abundant light and nutrients to take up carbon the way plants do.

In the fall, this picture reverses itself. Wind and cooling temperatures bring the

lake's deep waters to the surface, and with them comes carbon dioxide that has built up deep in the lake, where microbes decompose plant and animal remains. Once the surface water has higher carbon dioxide levels than the air, the gas diffuses out, and the lake becomes a carbon source.

But what happens in winter was a mystery until recently. The ferry stops running in November, and around the same time Bootsma's group has to remove the buoy from the lake to prevent ice damage.

Last winter, Milwaukee Water Works allowed Bootsma to put his carbon dioxide monitoring device inside its water treatment plant, which pulls in lake water from about three-quarters of a mile offshore. Early information suggests the lake is a source of carbon dioxide in winter and early spring.

Bootsma's group is now bringing together the data from the past three years to make a final call on the lake's effect on the atmosphere over a yearly cycle, and plans to submit it for publication early next year.

Taking on the same question in Lake Superior, McKinley leads a team that includes Urban and other researchers as part of the North American Carbon Program, which aims to determine the continent's carbon sources and sinks.

Urban's field studies of Superior suggested that it was a strong source of carbon to the atmosphere, enough to cancel out up to half the value, on a per-square-mile basis, of the sink created by the forests in the watershed.

But most of his measurements were made near shore, which tends to have higher carbon dioxide levels than the open lake because plant matter swept in from the watershed decomposes there.

McKinley thinks the lake is closer to neutral with respect to the atmosphere, based on a 10-year record of carbon dioxide data on the open lake compiled by the Environmental Protection Agency, and her group's computer model.

Her estimate of the lake's annual carbon dioxide emissions is equivalent to

only 1 percent of the carbon dioxide produced by fossil fuel burning each year in Michigan, Wisconsin and Minnesota combined.

But the EPA's data provide just "two snapshots" a year, in April and August, McKinley said. Without winter data, the lake's carbon dioxide emissions may be underestimated. And her model doesn't yet include rivers, a source of carbon to the lake.

The question is far from settled. But the researchers agree that the biology of the lakes — the algae that absorb carbon and the microbes that release it — strongly controls how they process carbon. They believe this effect is more important even than temperature, which affects how carbon dioxide dissolves in water.

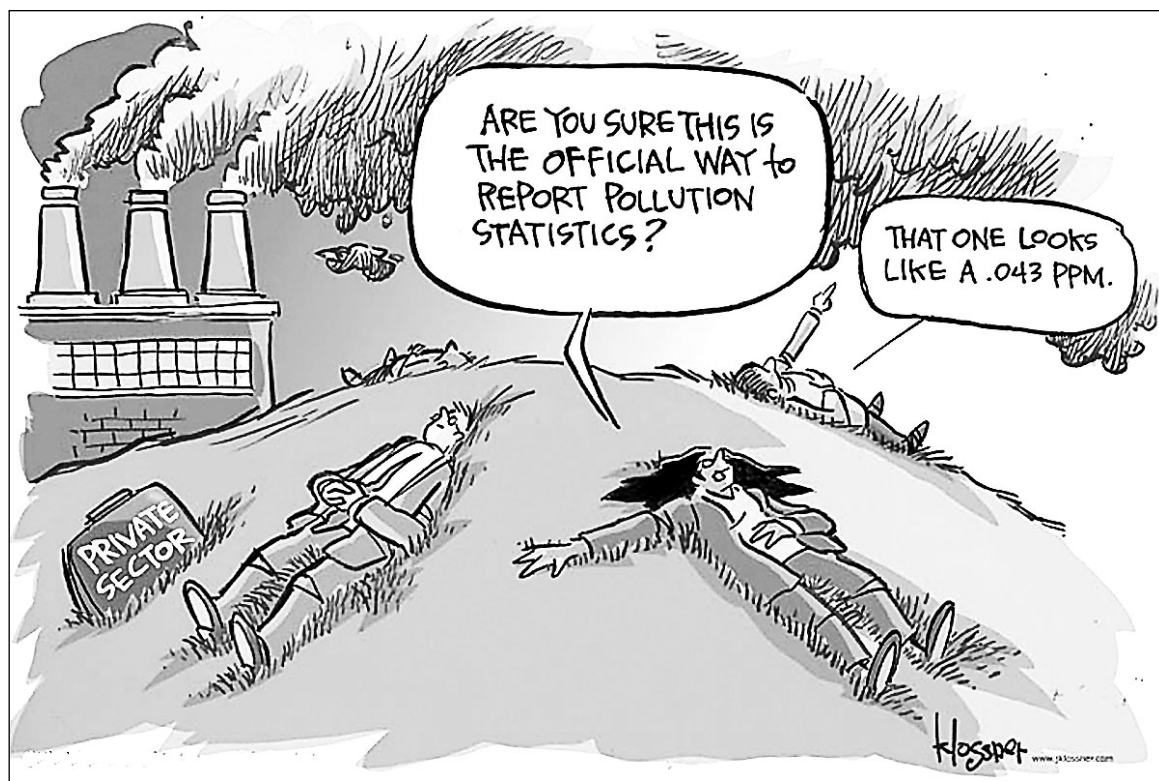
Changes to the Great Lakes' food web caused by invasive species apparently have already begun to affect the carbon dynamics of the region.

Bootsma said he was surprised by his results within a mile of shore in Lake Michigan, where quagga mussels have taken over the lake bottom. He expected that the mussels, which exhale carbon dioxide, would make the regions close to shore a source of the gas to the atmosphere.

Instead, he found that the mussels created "a perfect storm for cladophora," the nuisance green algae that grow near the shore on the lake bottom and often wash up on beaches, creating a terrible smell as they rot.

The mussels' filter feeding provides both light and nutrients to the algae. In perhaps the first heroic role played by cladophora, they are "sucking carbon dioxide out of the atmosphere" from late spring to early fall in the lake's coastal areas, Bootsma said. (This small benefit is not worth the problems cladophora cause, he added.)

In Superior, cold temperatures and low nutrient levels have kept invasive mussels from taking over, but "we may be in for some of those changes here as well," Urban said.



POLICY PENNINGS

What's Missing In The Balance Of Power?

BY DARYLL RAY
ag policy analyst

Balance of power issues in the poultry and livestock industries have been getting a lot of attention lately.

The focal points for those debates have been the joint hearings held by the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) and the Department of Justice and the new proposed Grain Inspection, Packers, and Stockyards Administration (GIPSA) rule. The issues under debate have tended to center on relationships between livestock and poultry producers and the packers/integrators who process their animals. But some would argue that the more important but unacknowledged "elephant" in the livestock pen is the retail sector.

It is not that the changes that have occurred in food retailing haven't been noticed by us all. Gone are the mom and pop grocery stores and small chains of the past. They have been bought out or driven out of business by the major grocery chains. We have also seen the introduction of groceries into general merchandise retailers like Wal-Mart, K-Mart, and Target.

Concurrent to this consolidation of grocery retailing has been a dramatic increase in the share of the retail meat dollar going to the retail sector at the expense of livestock producers. Historically, retailers' shares of meat expenditures have been relatively stable

and very modest compared to other foods. But during the last two decades that stability mold has been broken.

According to the Economic Research Service, USDA, in 1990 the retailer received 33 cents of the consumer dollar spent on beef and farmers received 59. By 2009, the retailers share increased 16 cents to 49, while farmers share dropped 17 cents to 42 cents of each beef dollar. During that same time period, packers increased their share from 8 cents to 9 cents of every beef dollar.

The story is equally dramatic in pork, where the retailers' share of a dollar spent on pork was 45 cents in 1990 and 61 cents in 2009. That 16 cent increase of each dollar going to retailers compares to a 20 cent drop to farmers, from 45 to 25 cents. The remaining four cents no longer going to farmers went to packers and integrators. Their share increased from 10 cents in 1990 to 14 cents in 2009.

In an article, "The Wal-Mart Factor in Ag Competition," Chris Clayton DTN Ag Policy Editor interviewed Mark Lauritsen, international vice president for the United Food and Commercial Workers Union. Lauritsen told Clayton that Wal-Mart is the largest grocery retailer in the US, selling \$150 billion in groceries in 2009. That accounts for 25 percent of the US grocery market an amount "larger than the next three grocery competitors combined."

Clayton writes, "Lauritsen...said Wal-Mart draws

in its food suppliers with the promise of big market share and retail space, but then constantly pushes on those suppliers to draw down on their prices. Packers then have no choice but to squeeze workers for concessions and pay less for livestock. If the government is going to look properly at antitrust in agriculture, Lauritsen said USDA and Department of Justice need to bring in the Federal Trade Commission, which oversees antitrust in the retail sector."

Few people like to see government intervention in the market, but when a few grocery retailers and meat processors buy the production of hundreds of thousands of livestock producers there will be the possibility for a less than textbook-like result. Markets work best when neither the buyer nor the seller can unilaterally influence prices.

It is expected that during the final joint Department of Justice/Agriculture competition workshop on December 8, 2010 retail issues will be aired. Specifically, the December 8th workshop will look at the discrepancies between the prices received by farmers and the prices paid by consumers.

Daryll E. Ray holds the Blasingame Chair of Excellence in Agricultural Policy, Institute of Agriculture, University of Tennessee, and is the Director of UT's Agricultural Policy Analysis Center (APAC).

Regulator Urges Caution After Massive Egg Recall

BY JEFFRY BARTASH
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WASHINGTON — Forget eating your eggs over easy. At least for now.

That's the advice of the government's top food-safety regulator after the nationwide recall of more than half a billion eggs tied to an outbreak of salmonella poisoning.

Margaret Hamburg, commissioner of the Food and Drug Administration, said the agency continues to investigate the source of the contamination and could issue additional recalls. Consumers should take extra safety precautions, such as washing hands before and after handling eggs and cooking the eggs thoroughly, she said.

"No more runny egg yolks for mopping up with toast," Hamburg said during a recent interview on NBC's "Today" show.

The eggs being recalled were sold in at least 22 states under as many as 24 different brands. The recall is the biggest in "recent memory," Hamburg said.

The FDA ordered the recall last week after nearly 2,000 episodes of salmonella poisoning were reported between May and July, mostly in the Midwest, according to the Centers for Disease Control. In a typical year, about 700 cases would have been reported during that period.

Salmonella poisoning can be fatal for the very young, the very old or those with poor immune systems. Most cases involve temporary symptoms such as nausea, diarrhea, stomach pain and some vomiting.

Hamburg said the delay in the recall stemmed from the difficulty of tracing the source of contamination. The form of salmonella involved in the outbreak is the most common, making it hard to determine its origin, she said.

Eventually, the FDA investigation led to two Iowa-based producers, Wright County Egg and Hillandale Farms. Wright County Egg is owned by Jack DeCoster, who owns other produce companies that have been cited for repeated violations extending as far back as 1994.

In the U.S., nearly 80 billion whole eggs are produced for sale each year, some of which are exported. Iowa is by far the nation's leading producer.



'O Brother Where Art Thou' Artists To Perform At Schiferl's WJ Ranch

Saturday, Sept 18 at 8:00 p.m., Dan Tyminski and Ronnie Bowman will be in concert at the WJ Ranch south of Yankton.

Dan is a member of Alison Kraus' Band "Union Station," and was the voice of George Clooney, singing "O Brother Where Art Thou" as the "Soggy Bottom Boys" in the movie.

Ronnie was a member of the most well known bluegrass band "Lonesome River Band" and is a songwriter for Brooks & Dunn and Kenny Chesney.

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