

Statement on Beef Checkoff by
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We have decided to drop our Beef Checkoff lawsuit on advice that to continue on would be both very expensive and futile. The motion to dismiss was filed yesterday.

Never mind that the program has always been (and still is) promoted as producer-controlled, the US Supreme Court ruled last spring that the Beef Checkoff is a "targeted tax" to fund "the government's own speech". This means the federal bureaucracy is free to shape the program to benefit whatever interests it favors within the industry.

This seems to mean there is no legal recourse left against the way USDA handed effective control of the Checkoff over to the big-business-dominated National Cattlemen's Beef Association (NCBA) in 1997. Since then, every Checkoff dollar collected has increased NCBA's influence and power to work against independent cattlemen's interests and for packer, processor and big feeder advantage. It looks like we are stuck with a Checkoff that has been corrupted into a private "NCBA Tax", with USDA serving as their enforcer.

We find it deeply humiliating to be forced to submit and "pay tribute" to NCBA like this. Every Checkoff payment, every deceptive ad that pretends the program is producer-controlled, every conglomerate-friendly grant contract is a bitter reminder of NCBA's quasi-governmental power and our own subservient status in today's cattle industry. And it is only going to get worse until people unite to end this frightening merger of bureaucracy and big business. No market or trade reforms will succeed while NCBA is in the driver's seat. The recent push for a "privatized" national animal ID program is yet another trick to concentrate even more money and power with NCBA.

Some cattlemen are calling for a new Beef Checkoff referendum. We frankly feel another petition drive would be an exercise in futility, given the way USDA's unfair procedures threw out thousands of bona fide producer signatures to disqualify the livestock auctions' heroic petition effort in 2001. Worse yet, USDA is under no obligation to honor a vote. No bureaucracy is going to give up this extraordinary power to tax and control that even escapes congressional budget oversight! The only way we see to end the "NCBA Tax" is to get Congress to understand what a big racket these Checkoffs have become and to win flat out repeal of the federal enabling legislation.

We would like to publicly express our thanks for the moral and financial support so many people have given us over the last eight years in this piece of the on-going struggle for an independent, competitive bid cattle industry. We look forward to fighting beside you again in the battles to come.

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