

New regulation increases cattle rendering rates

By JOSH FLINT

In several folks' opinion, a new FDA rule that attempts to further lower the threat of bovine spongiform encephalopathy is a classic case of over-regulation.

The rule requires rendering companies to remove the brain and spinal cord prior to processing cattle carcasses that are 30 months or older. If the brain and spinal cord are not "effectively" removed, the animal cannot be used for feed byproducts and must be placed in a landfill, buried or composted.

Maralee Johnson, executive vice president for the Illinois Beef Association, says the Bovine Feed Ban, enacted in 1997, has worked well and additional regulations won't boost beef prices or open new markets. "You're putting undue cost on producers, and for what gain?" she asks. "The cost-benefit ratio for this new rule is immeasurably small."



JOHNSON

New procedures

The new regulation became effective April 27. However, the Food and Drug Administration has since allowed rendering companies a six-month grace period to bring their operation into compliance with the standard.

Prior to this rule, Diane Rasp, executive officer for Millstadt Rendering, says her company operated as a normal skin-and-grind rendering facility. To meet the new requirements, they've

had to add carcass-hanging equipment and additional personnel. "Now, we pretty much have to butcher it," she explains.

In preparing to enforce this rule, Rasp says, many regulators were unfamiliar with what it required of rendering companies. "It is going to increase the cost to dispose of animals 30 months and older," Rasp adds. Millstadt Rendering will now charge \$40 to remove an animal 30 months or older.

Economic sense

While rendering costs are expected to increase, some rendering companies may simply stop picking up animals 30 months and older. Mark Myers, with Darling International, says the company is currently looking at which locations will continue picking up the older animals.

"I don't know if the economics are favorable to continue the removal process in some locations," Myers explains. "The difficulty we're having is finding landfills that are willing to take carcasses."

Pearl City dairy producer Doug Block expects his rendering fees to more than triple before the year's out. In the meantime, he's exploring other options, such as composting or burial. Regardless, he says it's a clear case of over-regulation.

"We've never had a cow in the U.S. with BSE," Block notes. "The two instances where BSE was found in the U.S. came from Canadian cows."

IBA President Trevor Toland plans to create a speakers bureau — essentially, a list of MBA graduates who can speak at Rotary meetings, Lions meetings and more. "And they need to get in grocery stores, in front of the meat counter. Ask people what they're concerned about, what questions they might have," Toland says.

■ For more details or to join the MBA program, e-mail pbiller@shelbywb.coop or visit www.illinoisbeef.com.

Beef Association, boasts 500 graduates nationwide and is made up of six one-hour online courses. Students work through topics on production, safety, nutrition, animal care, environment and the beef checkoff.

The goal, says Illinois Beef Association's Penny Blier, is to teach folks how to talk to consumers about beef. "There are many different ways to be an industry spokesperson," she says. "Advocacy can be as simple as sharing your story with friends and neighbors when the opportunity presents itself."

NCBA looks to Illinois for leadership



STEVE FOGLESONG

WHEN Astoria cattleman Steve Foglesong takes over as president of the National Cattlemen's Beef Association this winter, he'll be the first Illinois producer to do so since Dan Koons took the helm in 1994. With his family, Foglesong operates a 400-head cow-calf herd and has 5,000 head on feed. He's been involved with NCBA for more than 20 years, and recently took a break from fence building to chat with *Prairie Farmer*.

PF: What do Illinois beef producers need to know about lobbying?

Foglesong: The political climate in Washington, D.C., is different. If you visited a legislator back in 1988, you could virtually guarantee you'd run into an ag aide who would've been from a land-grant college. They had some basis in agriculture. Today you're just as likely to get a history major or a political science major. Now instead of just trying to persuade votes, we're trying to explain what we do for a living. Our role is bigger than what it was in 1988. Telling our story and telling it well — that's what we've gotta do.

PF: How about the Humane Society of the United States?

Foglesong: We saw Wayne Pacelle on the steps of the Capitol last week. He's smart and slick and ultimately wants to put us out of business. He's public enemy No. 1 for the beef cattle business. HSUS is for a 100% vegan lifestyle. They want us out of business.

PF: What's it like representing NCBA's ethanol policy back

here in the corn belt?

Foglesong: It's important to remember that NCBA's policy is completely member-driven. So I'm representing what the majority of our cattle producers want. Here in the corn belt, there are some differing opinions. So I always say, if you want to change policy, come to the meeting. Don't sit at home and complain. It's a democracy. If you want change, first, show up at meetings; second, bring all your friends; and third, change the policy. If you want to be represented by corn-raising cattle producers, it's within your power. I also make a point to say that NCBA isn't anti-ethanol, or even anti-corn-based-ethanol. We just ask for a level playing field.

At the end of the day, we need to see the larger picture. NCBA is just about the only organization standing up for cattle producers in Washington, D.C. I understand that on 95% we'll agree right down the line. On 5% we'll have to agree to disagree. On the rest, we're arm in arm.

PF: Clearly, you're optimistic about cattle feeding in Illinois.

Foglesong: We're cattle feeders. We have a big confinement building that's 2 years old. In Illinois, there's not a lot of cattle fed, and we have a boatload of ethanol byproducts. We think it's a great place to feed cattle. Our feed cost is an advantage. I could feed cattle anywhere in the country. But I choose to feed them here. A negative for Illinois would be the lack of packing capacity and lack of competition among

packers. I tell Sen. [Richard] Durbin every time I see him, I need another packer.

PF: Parting thoughts?

Foglesong: I'd like to see us work toward unity between people in agriculture. There are so few of us. We can't afford to be fractioned. Lots of forces would like to put us out of business. We owe it to our kids and our kids' kids to put differences aside and figure out ways to work together to be influential in Washington. There are other folks out there who want to affect what we do, and it's up to us to make a difference.

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