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The information in this column is presented by the Pennsylvania Cattlemen's Association for those who have an interest in the cattle industry.

Cattlemen's Issues/Developments

When it rains, it pours — and after a period of good to excellent cattle prices, the good times have ended — temporarily. In addition to declining prices, there are other developments that affect the cattle business. When we are feeding cattle, sorting calves, or tending to other details of our business — we many times forget that there are state, national, and even international developments that also affect our business — and our profitability. Some of these recent developments are summarized below.

NAFTA — stands for the North American Free Trade Agreement, which is supported essentially by all of agriculture. The vote is scheduled for November 17. Although there are many reasons for Congress to pass this legislation and the NAFTA Agreement, one of the biggest positives is the continued expansion of beef, veal, variety meat, tallow, hides, and live cattle exports. US exports of beef and variety meats to Mexico amounted to approximately \$260 million in 1992, growing about \$50 million per year since 1989. It has been calculated that U.S. exports of beef cattle has added about \$3 per pound to finished

cattle and only slightly less to feeder cattle prices. Beef exports are almost \$970 million more than beef imports, giving us a positive trade balance for our commodity. Like most other countries, Mexico has 10 to 25% tariffs on imported agricultural goods and has the legal right to raise them to 50%. There are safeguards as far as unnecessary environmental restrictions, animal health risks, etc. that are included in the intent of the NAFTA legislation. We hope that if it is not too late, you will contact your legislators encouraging them to vote for the NAFTA. Right now it does not appear that NAFTA will pass since the anti-NAFTA forces have been very active.

Reduction in USDA's market promotion program — even though agricultural exports have gradually increased and there is an increasingly large positive trade balance in all of agriculture, these funds were reduced in this year's budget. Federal dollars earmarked for market promotion is matched by private industry — including beef and pork check-off dollars. Although the amount of funds committed to export promotion from private agricultural industry has increased — it is unlikely that our agricultural organizations and

private companies can increase their investment to offset the loss of federal support. Exports from the US mean many things — including more jobs and more profits.

A success story; Beef/Veal Quality Assurance — the QA program has expanded into 43 states, covering 98% of the total fed cattle marketed and at least 90% of the cow-calf producers. The beef industry has essentially a zero violative drug, chemical, and pesticide rate in fed cattle, and the level in cull beef and dairy cows is being reduced. There probably will be more emphasis on cull cows, both beef and dairy in the coming months. The incidence rate of top sirloin injection-site blemishes over the past 24 months has been reduced from 22.3% to 9.9%. All the "players" — veterinarians, allied industry, marketing sector, and packing industry are giving excellent support. The veal industry, which is closely related to the beef and dairy industries in many ways, has reduced violative residues from 3.3% in 1988 to less than .13% in 1992. Do voluntary producer-conducted and producer-funded programs work? You bet! In Pennsylvania, the Pennsylvania Beef Council is providing some funds to help conduct needed seminars and produce educational materials for the Quality Assurance Program.

Eat beef "anytime" says Mayo Clinic — recent Mayo Clinic health letter contained a chart outlining guidelines for low-fat, low-cholesterol diet. Foods are categorized as those that can be eaten anytime, sometimes, or seldom — and beef is one of the "eat anytime" foods provided the beef is choice or select beef round steak, sirloin, tenderloin, flank or ground round — and be the basis of the total diet. We can live with that!

Reinventing government comments — according to NCA, there are some good points and bad points in the Clinton administration reinventing government

moves. Among the changes favored is the combination of agriculture research, extension service, and national agriculture library into a new Agricultural Research and Education Service. Another positive is the use of a science-based plan for food (including meat) inspection, and generally reducing federal spending. However, NCA noted that shifting the Food Safety and Inspection Service from the jurisdiction of the USDA would be an inefficient move and might damage the ongoing meat inspection reform. NCA and several other agricultural associations also took issue with the very negative reference to the E.coli-caused deaths in the USDA promotion of mandatory safe-handling labels on raw meat and poultry products. Many times the more positive approach is more effective — especially with all the improvements in meat inspection that are planned. Our meat inspection program still represents an important advantage for our meat industries over other countries.

Beef consumption to rise? — the American Meat Institute is predicting per-capita beef consumption to rise slightly in 1994, and NCA agrees. However the increase in consumption reflects increased production because of slightly increased cow herd expansion — we sell and eat all we produce at some price, stated NCA economists.

Farm-Environmentalists cooperation urged — representatives of the Chesapeake Bay Foundation (CBF) and National Cattlemen's Association (NCA) recently toured the Waffle Hill Farm, Churchville, MD, owned and operated by Lawrason Sayre and family. The Sayre family were winners of the NCA's Northeastern Regional Environmental Stewardship Award last year. CBF spokespersons indicated that the Sayre family had helped to protect the Bay from overloads of sediment and nutrients that contribute to algae blooms and loss of under-

water gases. CBF and NCA agreed that farmers and environmentalists should work together and that they need each other. The 1993 Pennsylvania Cattlemen's Association nominee for the NCA Environmental Stewardship Award was ErReR Hill Farm, Somerset, PA, owned by Mr. & Mrs. Sidney Riggs and managed by Bob Hay.

Spending on food continues to decrease — the share of the average US income spent on food decreased again — from 11.7% in 1991 to 11.4% in 1992. This could be taken as another indication of increased efficiency in agriculture production, but it might also mean that food is being produced by our farmers at an ever-decreasing profit margin.

Good reading — did ELSIE choose the parlor? — the doctrine of the animal rightists — is based upon a theory that humans take advantage of animals by using them, causing them pain, suffering, changed behavior, boredom, and death — was met head-on by Steven Budiansky in his book "The Covenant of the Wild: Why animals chose domestication." Among many other contentions, Budiansky suggested a bargain, of sorts, was struck between animals and humanity near the dawn of time. Simply put today's domesticated animals chose to live along with man. The animals chose this way of life because they gained a steadier supply of feed, shelter, companionship, and care. Mankind gained food, clothing, companionship, and all the other benefits that animals bring with them. This may sound like an idealistic argument, but it is one that if more people would accept, perhaps there would be less problems from activists making unsubstantiated theoretical claims which affect the amount of animal products used by our citizenry.

For more information: contact the Pennsylvania Cattlemen's Association, R.D.#1, Box 83, Port Matilda, PA 16870. Phone: 814-692-4280.

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