

What's For Dinner If The Checkoff Ends? Beef Council Looks At Options



Paul Slayton

DAVE LEFEVER
Lancaster Farming Staff
GRANTVILLE (Dauphin Co.) — The Pennsylvania Beef Council (PBC) this week addressed the possibility of the national beef checkoff program coming to an end.

The council's annual dinner and business meeting took place at the Grantville Holiday Inn Wednesday evening. The meal featured new beef products that the checkoff program helped launch this year, including shoulder tenders and cheeseburger fries.

"We need a checkoff program," said Paul Slayton, PBC executive director. "I can't imagine this world without a checkoff."

By Jan. 27, 2004 the U.S. Supreme Court must decide whether they will hear the case for the constitutionality of the checkoff program, which was originally challenged in U.S. District Court in South Dakota in 2002, then failed to be upheld in the Eighth Circuit Court of Appeals this past July.

If the Supreme Court decides to hear testimony for the national checkoff, the case would likely be brought late in 2004 and the decision made sometime in 2005, Slayton said.

Under the national beef checkoff program, producers pay \$1 for each head of beef cattle they

market to help fund beef promotion in the country.

"If (the Supreme Court) decides not to hear the case, we shut the door, turn out the lights, and go home," Slayton said.

Given that possibility, Slayton posed a challenge to the group to work with the Pennsylvania Department of Agriculture on developing a state-wide beef marketing program through the advocacy of other farm groups in the state.

"When do you want to stand up and put something in place?" Slayton said.

Members approved a motion to move forward with such a proposition. Because PBC itself could not legally spearhead the project, Slayton said the initiative would need to come from organizations such as the Pennsylvania Farm Bureau and Pennsylvania Cattlemen's Association (PCA).

Terry Shearer, PCA president, said he would ask members of his organization to form a committee to move ahead with the initiative.

Dennis Wolff, Pennsylvania agriculture secretary, spoke about the possibility of developing a Pennsylvania beef marketing act, similar to programs already in place for several other commodities in the state, including apples, milk, vegetables, and wine.

Developing this kind of in-state checkoff program "takes

some time," Wolff said, noting that it would be about two years from its approval until beef promotion funds would start to flow.

Frank Stoltzfus, PCB board member and PCA representative, said that, although "the national program has benefits that we're never going to have from a state program," a Pennsylvania checkoff could also offer a unique opportunity.

"We could do a fairly reasonable job of marketing beef to a sector of the nation where the people are," Stoltzfus said.

Some PCB members expressed concern that Pennsylvania beef producers may reject a state checkoff referendum if all producers are allowed one vote, regardless of the size of their operation.

"If we had a referendum in the state, it would be a ... close vote," said Bill McCoy, ex-officio National Cattlemen's Beef Association representative.

Dr. John Comerford of Penn State noted that the original checkoff vote in 1988 passed by a large majority, and that producer size shouldn't be a concern.

Slayton listed promotion activities funded by national checkoff. Beef demand in the U.S. has increased by 10 percent in the past five years, reversing a 20-year downward trend.

According to Slayton, that's

hard proof that the checkoff program and its "Beef: It's What's for Dinner" campaign works. He said beef promotion through the checkoff brings producers about \$200 more per head.

The checkoff has a lot to do with the record high cattle prices producers have enjoyed this fall, according to Slayton.

"It irks me when people say it was because they shut down the (Canadian) border," he said. "Yes, that's eight percent less beef, but there are a lot of other things going on."

This year, PBC pushed for the initiation of "May Beef Month," which was announced by Gov. Ed Rendell and featured PBC serving grilled hamburgers at the "Great Pennsylvania Workout Day" at the Capitol.

Other PBC work in the state

this year included a campaign to promote Pennsylvania's Beef Quality Assurance (BQA) program, with a focus on certifying dairy producers. This promotion kicked off in timely fashion on May 19 — one day before the BSE (bovine spongiform encephalopathy) case was announced in Cana-

da.

"Issues management" is probably the most important function of the national checkoff program, according to Slayton.

After BSE hit the news, beef promoters quickly spread word that the U.S. beef supply was safe.

"Consumer confidence really didn't waver," Slayton said.

Wolff Appoints New Director

HARRISBURG (Dauphin Co.) — On Thursday, Secretary of Agriculture Dennis C. Wolff announced that Earl M. Haas has been named director of the Bureau of Plant Industry.

"The Bureau of Plant Industry plays a critical role in protecting agriculture in Pennsylvania and the United States," said Wolff. "I am pleased that Earl has accepted this post as he has the knowledge and experience necessary to deal with the many plant and crop-related challenges we encounter in agriculture."

Haas joined the department in 1982 as an agricultural products inspector in the southeast region. In his new role, Haas will be responsible for consumer protection in areas ranging from animal feed and greenhouse products to pesticides. Overseeing 85 full-time employees and up to 90 temporary employees, Haas will also direct programs in areas of farm safety, sustainable agriculture, and plant certification.

November Fluid Milk Price Announced

HARRISBURG (Dauphin Co.) — The Pennsylvania Milk Marketing Board (PMMB) recently announced the prices to be paid to Pennsylvania dairy farmers for November Class 1 milk (beverage) as an average of \$18.42 in the western areas of the state and an average of \$18.91 in central and eastern areas. These prices include the over-order premium of \$1.65 per one hundred pounds of milk.

Farmers, whose milk production is pooled under a federal order, will receive a market-wide blend price based upon the value of all classes of milk. However, the blend price received will vary as the component composition of a farmer's milk differs from the established benchmarks of 3.5 percent butterfat, 2.99 percent protein, and 5.69 percent other solids.

Over-Order Premium \$1.65

HARRISBURG (Dauphin Co.) — Pennsylvania Milk Marketing Board Chairman Boyd E. Wolff recently announced that board members have voted unanimously to continue the current level of the over-order premium. The over-order

premium is paid on Class 1 (bottled) milk produced, processed, and sold within the state. The over-order premium of \$1.65 was due to expire Dec. 31. As a result of this vote, the \$1.65 over-order premium will be maintained at \$1.65 Jan. 1 through June 30.

This action is the result of a hearing conducted Dec. 3 in response to a petition submitted by the Pennsylvania Farm Bureau.

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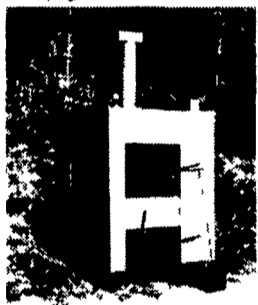
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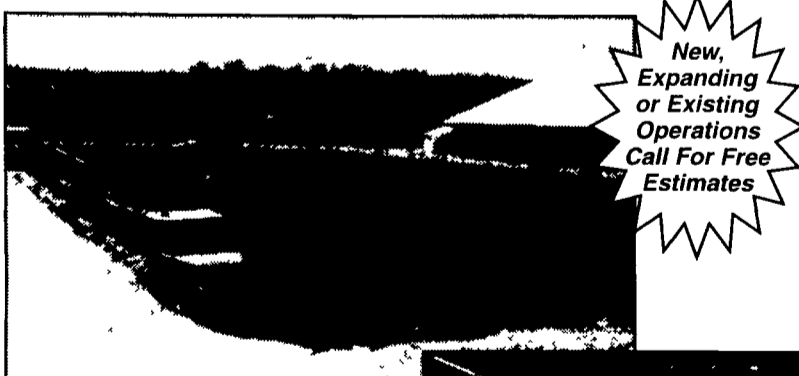
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