

COMMITTEE: AGRICULTURE AND ENERGY

POLICY: ANIMAL AGRICULTURE PRODUCTION

TYPE: CONSENT

The National Conference of State Legislatures (NCSL) believes a strong animal production agriculture capacity is imperative in maintaining domestic and international consumer confidence in the safety of the United States meat supply.

Animal Identification

The National Conference of State Legislatures (NCSL) believes a national animal identification, if properly implemented in cooperation with the states and territories, could be beneficial in maintaining consumer confidence in meat from the United States, an invaluable tool in reducing and tracking future outbreaks of infectious disease, and serving as a important firewall against any attempted terrorist attack on the food production system in the United States.

Any future effort by USDA to develop a national animal identification program must be designed and implemented in full consultation with state legislatures to ensure proper attention to public interest and financial considerations. Any program must be designed and implemented in cooperation with the departments of agriculture of the states and territories. USDA must work to ensure that any animal identification system is compatible with the current inspection and enforcement systems of the state governments. Any applicable federal program should not be applied to animals involved in intrastate commerce without state consultation.

Equine Industry and USDA Inspection of Horse Meat

The processing of horses has become a controversial and emotional issue, resulting in the closure of the last horse processing facility in the United States. Without affordable and economic alternatives, unwanted horses are abandoned. The nation's inadequate and overburdened horse rescue and adoption facilities cannot begin to handle the influx. These additional unwanted horses will compete for adoption with wild horses that are currently fed and sheltered at a public expense. In the Western United States (US), the additional pressure on public lands from horses turned out to run wild is only intensifying the over-population, over-grazing, and ultimate destruction of the ecosystem.

NCSL urges members of Congress to:

- Recognize the need for humane horse processing facilities in the United States.
- Not to interfere with State efforts to establish facilities in the United States. State livestock programs that were once able to recoup the costs of caring and feeding for abandoned animals by marketing them, are now forced to greatly increase their budgets at the expense of taxpayers.
- Recognize the positive economic impact of willing market for the US horse industry. These, and ethnic markets inside the US would appreciate an additional source of high quality protein untainted by disease concerns of other species of livestock.
- Oppose legislation that would restrict the market, transport, processing, or export of horses. Horse processing in the United States is particularly tightly regulated, and the horse is the only animal whose transportation to processing is regulated.

Horse processing facilities in the United States are required to have United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) veterinarians supervise the euthanasia, and the euthanasia method is humane, according to the American Veterinary Medical Association and the United States Department of Agriculture.

- Oppose limitations under federal appropriations law prohibiting the use of federal dollars to be spent on the salaries of inspectors for ante- and post mortem inspections.

Interstate Sale of State-Inspected Meat and Poultry

The Farm Bill program authorizes USDA to promulgate rules to establish the parameters of the state programs. The proposed draft rule would allow these states to establish an interstate meat shipment program and request selected establishment status for those businesses who wish to remain state inspected, but wish to market products in interstate commerce. The creation of interstate sales of state-inspected meat and poultry programs will level the economic playing field for small business, spur more competition in the marketplace, create a more uniform inspection system, and enhance consumer confidence in the food supply—all of which will benefit farmers, ranchers, processors, small business, and consumers.

The National Conference of State Legislatures supports the establishment of interstate shipment of state-inspected meat and poultry programs in qualifying states, and urges USDA to create rules that facilitate the program.