

Eye on Washington

NCBA staffer offers update on government affairs.

Story & photo
by **TROY SMITH**, field editor

There is a lengthy list of issues that keep Allison Cooke up at night. The U.S.

Farm Bill, tax reform, endangered species, environmental issues and international

trade agreements are some of the legislative matters of concern to Cooke and her colleagues working at the Washington, D.C., office of the National Cattlemen's Beef Association (NCBA).

Cooke, who is NCBA's executive director of government affairs, is part of the staff tasked with studying proposed laws and regulations, and then accentuating the positive and eliminating the negative consequences for the beef industry. During Range Beef Cow Symposium XXV, hosted Nov. 28-30, in Cheyenne, Wyo., Cooke talked about some of the issues that also rob cattlemen of needed sleep.

With regard to the farm bill, Cooke said three items have been prioritized by NCBA. First is to advocate on behalf of agricultural research — necessary due to shrinking allocation of federal funding for research purposes. Second is to advocate for continuation of funding for conservation stewardship programs, such as the Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP). Thirdly, NCBA is lobbying in favor of creating a foot-and-mouth disease (FMD) vaccine bank as an "insurance policy," in the event of an FMD outbreak.

"NAFTA (North American Free Trade Agreement) is a great success story. We don't want to mess it up," stated Allison Cooke, adding that NCBA is putting pressure on the White House to consider carefully the benefits of NAFTA.

Cooke also talked about a congressional rule mandating use of electronic logging devices (ELD) by motor carriers, and its consequences for livestock haulers. An ELD attaches to a truck's engine to automatically record driving time, thus eliminating written logbooks. Cooke said NCBA has pointed out that the required limits on "hours of service" are not compatible with livestock transport. Under the rule, drivers are required to spend a minimum amount of time off duty, following a maximum allowed period of driving time.

Questions remain, however, regarding application to drivers transporting livestock. For example, does off-duty time include that time spent waiting at a livestock auction, after delivering cattle and before loading again after the sale? Additional questions revolve around a driver reaching his or

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“This is a case where a one-size-fits-all solution doesn’t work.” NCBA’s Allison Cooke said of the congressional rule mandating use of electronic logging devices by motor carriers. “We’re not hauling boxes of goods; we’re hauling live animals.”

her maximum hours of service while on the road with a loaded trailer.

“This is a case where a one-size-fits-all solution doesn’t work. We’re not hauling boxes of goods; we’re hauling live animals,” said Cooke, explaining that NCBA favors more flexibility for livestock haulers, including allowance for longer hours of service. While set to go into effect Dec. 18, 2017, a 90-day waiver on the use of ELDs has been issued.

“That’s good,” said Cooke, “but we really need more time to transition to full implementation of the ELD rule.”

Calling tax reform “badly needed,” Cooke said repeal of the federal estate tax remains a top priority for NCBA — one with no room for compromise.

On the environmental front, Cooke said the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) has proposed a rule requiring emissions reporting by a broader range of livestock operations, including relatively small operations.

“The good news is that the mandate has been stayed,” Cooke reported. “That gives more time to make it go away.”

Regarding international trade, Cooke said it’s unfortunate that the current presidential administration does not look favorably on trade agreements.

“NAFTA (North American Free Trade Agreement) is a great success story. We don’t want to mess it up,” stated Cooke, adding that NCBA is putting pressure on the White House to consider carefully the benefits of NAFTA. She said NCBA is also encouraging the administration to complete appointments to vacant high-level posts within USDA.

NCBA members will focus on legislative issues and set its policy positions for the coming year at the 2018 Cattle Industry Convention in Phoenix, Ariz., Jan. 29-Feb. 3. Angus Media will be on hand to cover the event. Watch for news postings on the American Angus Association website, www.angus.org.



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