

Changing For The Better

NCBA members elect officers and approve new organizational structure concept, policies for 2010.

by **BETHANY SHIVELY**
for NCBA

The annual Cattle Industry Convention concluded Jan. 30 with the National Cattlemen's Beef Association (NCBA) board of directors meeting and annual membership meeting. During the meetings, members voted on leadership and policies to ensure the organization's success in 2010. More than 6,000 people attended this year's convention in San Antonio, Texas.

Steve Foglesong, owner of Black Gold Ranch in Illinois, was officially elected to succeed Gary Voogt as NCBA's new president. Foglesong encouraged NCBA members to join him in leading the industry — and the association — to an even stronger future by getting engaged in the issues and telling their story to the public, as well as lawmakers in Washington, D.C.

"Our industry has a great story to tell," Foglesong said. "Our numbers may be small, but when each of us engages and makes our voice heard, we are a force to be reckoned with."

In a landmark vote, the board approved a new organization structure, as presented by the Governance Task Force. The board also demonstrated confidence in NCBA by voting unanimously to approve a dues increase to help ensure the organization is on sound financial footing. Dues now start at \$100 for cow-calf members. Feeder assessments increased from 10¢ to 12.5¢ per head. Earlier in the week, the Allied Industry Council also expressed its support of NCBA by voting to increase its member dues from \$17,500 to \$25,000.

In addition to structural changes, members approved a number of policy recommendations to guide NCBA efforts in Washington, D.C., in 2010:

- Members approved policy calling for reform of the Equal Access to Justice Act (EAJA). While EAJA was established by Congress to ensure that individuals, small businesses or public-interest groups with limited financial resources could seek judicial recourse from unreasonable government actions, a lack of federal oversight has allowed the Act to be abused, particularly by environmental-activist organizations, which often target farmers and ranchers under the guise of "public interest." In a six-year period, nonprofit environmental groups have filed more than 1,500 lawsuits and, in turn, the federal government has paid out billions in taxpayer dollars in settlements and legal fees under EAJA and other fee-shifting statutes in cases against the U.S. government.

- Members approved policy to address the growing problem of wild horse and burro overpopulation, which

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— Steve Foglesong

has contributed to range degradation and reductions in biodiversity and livestock productivity. The policy calls for a comprehensive program — including fertility control, sex ratios and other humane means of herd reduction — in accordance with the management options authorized to be used by the Bureau of Land Management (BLM).

NCBA Adopts Structural Concept

In preparation for key battles it foresees for the beef industry in coming years, the National Cattlemen's Beef Association (NCBA) board of directors voted to adopt a report and governance structure concept that would lead to significant structural changes to the organization.

Meeting at the 2010 Cattle Industry Convention, the board adopted the Governance Task Force report by a 201-13 margin, putting in motion the creation of a new governance structure, which would feature a smaller board of directors and a new House of Delegates that would include the organization's state affiliates, state beef councils, industry/breed organizations, and product/allied industry councils. The Federation of State Beef Councils would be housed within the House of Delegates and continue to conduct its federation duties as specified in the Beef Promotion and Research Act & Order.

"This is an important step in making our industry more responsive to the challenges it faces," said Jan Lyons, a Kansas beef producer and co-chair of the Governance Task Force. "There are entities across the country seeking to keep us from succeeding as cattlemen and women. The changes we have recommended make it easier for us to move quickly against those groups and assure that consumers know the facts about the great beef we produce and the people that produce it."

Specifics of the recommendations include:

- A board of directors that has 29 members, 26 of whom are elected by the House of Delegates. The board, which has legal and fiduciary responsibility for the organization;

- A House of Delegates with a total of 250 votes. Of those votes, 106 would go to state beef councils, 106 to state affiliates, and 38 to industry and breed organizations, as well as the allied industry/product council;

- The Federation of State Beef Councils within the House of Delegates that elects a chair and vice chair and the eight other members to the Beef Promotion Operating Committee;

- Committees approved by that board would make proposals to the House of Delegates. These committees would be comprised of NCBA members, members of member organizations and/or invited guests.

"Over the period of 18 months we visited with producers and worked hard to come up with a system that would maximize the capabilities of our organization," Lyons said. "We think this new structure will make us as strong as possible as we face the many adversities that face us today."

Lyons said the task force sought to maintain grassroots input and control of the organization. This is accomplished through the operations and structure of the House of Delegates, whose member organization votes will be weighted based on NCBA investment. They will vote on policy to be recommended to the board of directors, the policy-establishing body for the organization. Grassroots input will also be accomplished through committees of like-minded beef producers, who will provide input to the House of Delegates.

According to John Queen, task force co-chair and a beef producer from North Carolina, the group was

careful to develop recommendations that kept in mind the NCBA's quest for an industry with one vision, one plan and one voice. It determined that current structure that includes a 274-member board of directors is unwieldy and makes authority and accountability within the organization more difficult.

"We wanted to make it easier for the board to maneuver," Queen says. "At the same time, NCBA has always sought to conduct our affairs the right way, utilizing checkoff dollars only for those programs for which they were intended. Our recommendation is legal and maintains the strict firewalls required by law for checkoff and non-checkoff dollars." Queen says the recommendations comply with the Checkoff Act and Order. Legal counsel and the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) were consulted throughout the process.

The 21-member Task Force included both producer members and state organization staff interested in improving their national organization and the entire industry. Its recommendations were submitted to the NCBA Executive Committee in San Antonio, and discussed by the full board of directors during its annual meeting.

Working groups will be established to take the structure concept and further develop bylaws, investment schedules and a transition timeline. Bylaw changes will be considered by the board at the Summer Conference in Denver this July. If bylaws are approved at that meeting, implementation of the structure would begin.

Members passed policy calling on NCBA to urge Congress to immediately ratify the Korea-U.S. Free Trade Agreement (KORUS FTA) — one of the most important bilateral trade agreements in the history of the U.S. beef industry. According to South Korean Economic Minister Choi, who addressed the economic markets committee, U.S. competitors such as Australia are well on their way to finalizing free-trade agreements with Korea, putting U.S. competitiveness at risk for years to come.

NCBA will pursue priorities and strategies regarding both the modification of the National Brucellosis Eradication Program and the eradication of brucellosis from the Greater Yellowstone Area. New policy also directs NCBA to work to maintain producers' ability to keep their cattle healthy through the use of approved antibiotics.

All policies adopted are now subject to approval by more than 30,000 NCBA members nationwide. Convention results will become official after a mail-in ballot process concludes in March.

New leadership

In other news, former Vice President Bill Donald of Montana was confirmed as the new president-elect, and former Federation Division Chairman J.D. Alexander of Nebraska was elected to succeed Donald as vice president.

Other newly elected officers include Scott George, Wyoming, Federation Division chairman; David Dick, Missouri, Federation Division vice chairman; Bruce Hafefeld, California, Policy Division chairman; and Bob McCann, Texas, Policy Division vice chairman.

Foglesong ended the convention with his outlook for 2010. Despite the very real challenges facing the industry — including an overreaching federal government and increasing attacks by activist groups — he said he's optimistic about the year ahead.

"We have a nation of bright and professional agriculturalists who are ready to meet demand when it rebounds. And we have a noble profession — feeding people here at home and around the world. This is a job and a lifestyle to be proud of and fight for so we can turn a strong industry and industry association over to our next generation."

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