

The Cattlemen's Advocate

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Sticky Fingers

USDA fraudster steals \$200M in stunning scam

By CHRIS BENNETT
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Riding USDA's coattails, "diabolical genius" Nik Patel engineered a con of epic proportions, pocketing hundreds of millions in the name of rural America.

A crime "mere mortals wouldn't even contemplate." An astounding \$210-million haul pulled out the front doors of USDA.

Who steals over \$200 million in fake USDA loans, drives a Rolls, runs a chop-shop, and jets the globe? Who attempts to escape in a chartered plane, carries on scheming behind bars, draws his wife into the action, and triples down with more swindles—all after pleading guilty?

Nik Patel. The Florida-based

con artist steered a chain of astonishing agriculture-related scams, each more jaw-dropping than the previous, and racked up a whopping 52-year sentence in the federal pen.

Welcome to the manic reign of a brazen fraudster who forged his own fall. The biter got bit.

Life in the Fast Lane

In 2012, First Farmers Financial, helmed by CEO Nik Patel, was flying high with a flagship location in Orlando, Fla., and satellite offices in California and Georgia.

Twenty-nine years young and married with children, Patel hitched his wagon to USDA, specifically to the Business and Industry Guaranteed Loan Program, under the guise of helping rural communities. To ride USDA's coattails, Patel and First Farmers COO Tim Fisher crafted a lie from whole cloth. They fabricated documents claiming a solid business struc-

See USDA FRAUD, page 11

Frigid Feeding



COLD WEATHER TIPS — As The Cattlemen's Advocate was preparing to go to press for the February issue, Winter Storm Fern was bearing down on a large section of the U.S., bringing with it bone-chilling temperatures and the threat of crippling amounts of freezing rain and snow for many sections of cattle country. Experts say during extreme cold, cattle need extra energy to keep warm. They will eat more and need higher-quality feed to compensate. Producers should also provide bedding or a dry place for cattle to lie down or get out of the wind, and keep waterers thawed as best they can. (Photo courtesy of Eastern Missouri Commission Company)

LA Rams owner now nation's largest landowner

Stan Kroenke, the rancher and billionaire owner of the Los Angeles Rams, Denver Nuggets and other major sports teams, is now the largest private landowner in the United States, according to The Land Report, which tracks private land holdings.

In December, Kroenke completed the single-largest land purchase in the United States in more than a decade — more than 937,000 deeded acres of ranchland in New Mexico belonging to the heirs of Teledyne founder Henry Singleton (1916-1999), The Land Report said. The New York Times noted, "Mr. Kroenke owns roughly 60 million square feet of commercial space, including huge sports venues in Inglewood, Calif., and Denver.

He also owns the teams that play there — the Los Angeles Rams, Colorado Avalanche, Denver Nuggets and Colorado Mammoth — as well as the Colorado Rapids and Arsenal's men's and women's soccer teams in Britain. His wife, Ann Walton Kroenke, is an heiress to the Walmart fortune."

Lawsuit claims JBS ran faster B-shift lanes for Haitian workers

A group of Haitian workers sued JBS USA Food Company and Swift Beef Company, alleging the companies recruited and employed Haitian workers at the JBS beef plant in Greeley, Colo., under false promises, then subjected them to discriminatory treatment, unsafe working conditions and excessive fees tied to housing and transportation.

The proposed class action, filed in U.S. District Court for the District of Colorado, alleged JBS and Swift recruited Haitian workers beginning in late 2023 by promising high-paying jobs that required no English skills and included employer-provided housing. Plaintiffs alleged they instead were charged recruitment fees and were placed in overcrowded, unsanitary housing, including a motel and later a house, with some workers allegedly paying hundreds of dollars per week to remain housed.

The complaint alleged the

workers, who spoke Haitian Creole, received orientation and safety training in English and Spanish rather than a language they understood. Plaintiffs also alleged supervisors falsified training records to indicate workers understood the material. In July, a former safety trainer at the facility filed a lawsuit with similar allegations. The lawsuit further alleged Haitian workers were routinely denied access to unscheduled bathroom breaks, leading some to avoid water and food during shifts.

The complaint alleged JBS increased production line speeds on the B shift, where plaintiffs said most Haitian workers were assigned, at times exceeding the company's crewing guide maximum. Plaintiffs described injuries including musculoskeletal injuries, lacerations, burns and other incidents they attributed to inadequate training and line speed.

Claims included alleged vio-

lations of Title VII and Section 1981, Colorado's law against obtaining workers by misrepresentation, the Colorado Wage Claim Act and Colorado Minimum Wage Act, along with civil theft and unjust enrichment claims tied to recruitment fees, housing charges and transportation fees.

In September 2024, UFCW Local 7 called for a federal probe into the plant. At the time, JBS said Mackenson Remy, who is named more than 40 times in the 47-page lawsuit, was not an employee of the company and was no longer allowed on the property.

In a statement to Meating-

Texas warns of possible 'established' NWS flies in border states north of Mexico

isthmus of Panama.

The USDA, in cooperation with Mexican authorities, has stepped up releases of sterilized male flies to thwart the insects from propagating.

Mexico's agriculture regulatory agency has reported 11 new cases of NWS infestation in cattle and hogs since Dec. 30 in the Gulf state of Tamaulipas, which shares a 230-mile border with Texas.

"It's just plain cowboy logic

place, JBS said the company "strongly disagrees" with the claims made in the lawsuit.

"At JBS, treating our employees with dignity and respect is a core value of our company, regardless of nationality or background," the statement said. "We

See JBS, page 11

— when you're seeing this many cases, this fast, it tells you there may be established screwworm fly populations in Tamaulipas," Texas Agriculture Commissioner Sid Miller said. "We're grateful sterile fly deployment has begun, but make no mistake: Texas producers need to stay on high alert along our border."

Texas officials said they have no information that the infested

See NWS, page 11

UPCOMING SALES

Tuesday, Feb. 3 – High Noon Cow Sale
Tuesday, Feb. 10 – Feeder Special
Tuesday, Feb. 17 – Regular Sale
Tuesday, Feb. 24 – Feeder Special
Tuesday, March 3 – High Noon Cow Sale
Tuesday, March 10 – Feeder Special
Friday, March 13 – Bradshaw Bull Sale
Tuesday, March 17 – Regular Sale
Saturday, March 21 – MVAA Sale

Cattle Receiving Hours

Sunday: 12:00 p.m. – 5:00 p.m.
 Monday: 8:00 a.m. – 8:00 p.m.
 Tuesday: All Day Sale Day

F&T Field Reps

Al Dames Owner 573-231-5634	Jeff Woods Baylis, IL 217-491-0224	Jess Unterbrink Shelbina, MO 515-720-1774
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High Noon Cow Sale

**Tuesday, Feb. 3, 2026 • Noon
F&T Livestock Auction, Palmyra, MO**

We have several consignments to our F&T High Noon Cow Sale for February 3

Early Consignments

Dan Bush

66 Bred heifers. These will be predominantly black hided and all locally sourced. They are bred to start calving March 1 to calving ease bulls from Terry Little, Musgraves Angus and Sydenstricker Genetics. The bulls will also sell.

Jake and John Romine

60 Cow dispersal. This will be a complete dispersal of mature black cows believed to be 8 to 10 years old. Mostly commercial Angus and Angus crossbred cows that have been bred to two McBride Angus bulls and an Angell Thomas Charolais bull to start calving soon.

Ron and Sherry Morse

20 Red Angus bred heifers. These fancy Red Angus heifers are AI bred to Bieber Blue Chip to start calving March 7. These are bucket fed and handled for a good disposition and hotwire broke.

Rowena Farms

25 Red Angus 4-year-olds with huge Red Angus or Charolais crossbred calves... running back with Angell Thomas Charolais and a good black Simmental bull. Some of the calves will weigh up to 450 pounds! If you are looking for three in one's; it will be hard to find them any better.

Alvin Miller

12 black heifers. Seven of these are pairs will calves up to 400 pounds and are running back to a good black Angus bull. This is another opportunity for quality three in one's. Also 5 will be offered as dry cows in the first period that originally lost calves due to hot weather event or a freak farm accident.

Rudy Pate

18 fall heifer pairs. These bred heifers originated from Travis Hagan in Hamburg IL. 13 will be black and bwf with big calves. 5 will be Char-X heifers with big buckskin calves. The calves should mostly weigh 400 pounds and all came unassisted out of Andras Red Angus bulls. These will have an excellent genetic package and be running back with a black bull to start calving again the end of August. Some are showing slightly thinner as they are heifers and nursing a big calves. If you have extra silage or feed this consignment is one to consider.

Joni E Yoder

15 head dispersal. Having moved, will dispersal the cow herd. The females will mostly be red hided cows of running ages and three heifers. Most will be spring calving so there will be several offered as pairs. They ran with a Angell Thomas RA/Charolais bull, but a few of the late spring calvers could be bred to a black bull.

Joe Crigler

12 fall pairs. Six year old cows with big September calves at their side. These calves will be in the four-hundred-pound range. These cows originate from Tom Sturberg of New Haven, MO. They are running back with excellent Hereford and SimAngus bulls to start calving again on September first. Although listed last here these may be the best three in one consignment for the entire sale.

Gary Moore Angus

5 Heifer pairs. These balancer influenced females have September and October calves and are running back with a Sydenstricker Angus bull. Cows are sisters that originated out of Illinois and very gentle.

We will have numerous small consignments such as from Danny Petersheim with a half dozen or less pairs or bred. So if you're looking to buy singles or small lots there should be plenty of opportunities.

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165M ASA# 4512714 1/2 SM 1/2 AN

Homozygous Black, Homozygous Polled
TJ CHIEF 460G x TJ BIG EASY 317F

CE	BW	WW	YW	STAY	RE	\$API	STI
10.0	-0.7	74.1	112.1	15.2	0.58	131.2	80.6

133M ASA# 4512673 3/4 SM 1/4 AN

Homozygous Black, Homozygous Polled
BRIDLE BIT RESOURCE G9117 x TJ FLAT IRON 259G

CE	BW	WW	YW	STAY	RE	\$API	STI
14.6	-2.2	77.5	126.6	14.0	1.02	150.9	90.7

M309 ASA# [4539717] 1/2 SM 1/2 AN

Homozygous Black, Homozygous Polled
G A F PLAY BALL 080-0209 x HOOK'S GALILEO 210G

CE	BW	WW	YW	STAY	RE	\$API	STI
12.2	0.6	99.7	157.7	15.2	0.64	171.0	107.7



502N ASA# 4586738 5/8 SM 3/8 AN

Homozygous Black, Homozygous Polled
CCR PRIMAL 8036K x KBHR BOLD RULER H152

CE	BW	WW	YW	STAY	RE	\$API	STI
4.9	3.9	102.0	154.8	16.6	0.65	141.5	96.4

M332 ASA# 4539740 3/4 SM 1/4 AN

Homozygous Black, Homozygous Polled
LCDR ANTHEM 33K x BAR CK LUCK B1206Y

CE	BW	WW	YW	STAY	RE	\$API	STI
10.1	-1.4	86.2	134.9	16.8	1.04	167.7	100.9

M328 ASA# 4539736 3/4 SM 1/4 AN

Homozygous Black, Homozygous Polled
LCDR ANTHEM 33K x BAR CK LUCK B1206Y

CE	BW	WW	YW	STAY	RE	\$API	STI
15.1	-3.3	76.9	115.5	18.8	0.62	183.5	100.6



135M ASA# 4512675 3/4 SM 1/4 AN

Homozygous Black, Homozygous Polled
CCR BEDROCK 5171J x LCDR PROGRESSIVE 106G

CE	BW	WW	YW	STAY	RE	\$API	STI
14.8	-2.7	87.9	131.2	18.6	0.82	161.5	95.6

123N ASA# 4512717 3/4 SM 1/4 AN

Homozygous Black, Homozygous Polled
BRIDLE BIT RESOURCE G9117 x TJ FLAT IRON 259G

CE	BW	WW	YW	STAY	RE	\$API	STI
15.2	-4.1	66.1	103.1	18.6	1.08	153.5	83.8

13N ASA# 4586707 5/8 SM 3/8 AN

Homozygous Black, Homozygous Polled
TJ SANDHILLS SWAG 816L x CCR POUNDER 2054F

CE	BW	WW	YW	STAY	RE	\$API	STI
16.0	-4.4	69.3	110.7	15.4	0.84	151.3	85.9

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From the Publisher... Jon Angell

It is commonly known that when the notorious American bank robber of the 1950s was asked "Why do you rob banks?" Willie Sutton answered famously, "Because that's where the money is." This quote sums up what is known in law enforcement as "Sutton's Law" meaning to go where the most likely reward or solution lies.

I would like to point out that the biggest fraudsters and robbers have adapted to modern times. Government and government programs is where the money is. In the news with the Elan's DOGE Team, Medicare frauds, Somali government funded day care, all seem to attract undesirable characters because of what Willie Sutton made obvious to us; "That's where the money is."

For our feature this month we are running a story about a fraudster that tied to government links to pull things off. It is a rather interesting read for nothing else than the scale and brazen nature of the con.

As a conservative, I advocate for smaller government. On page 16, Sam Graves shares a similar position. I'd go on to say if you are going to have government involvement to decentralize it. On page 20 is a story about the USDA reorganizing and pushing more out of Washington, DC. I wouldn't stop at the USDA, but would include nearly all branches and divisions. The Interior Department should be mostly in the interior and so forth. This is better for a lot of reasons.

You will always have some level of fraud, abuse, and thievery. Huge instances of fraud and abuse are everywhere in the news. I think we all know that the problems being revealed in Minnesota are not an isolated problem. It is rampant. California often brags that if it were its own country it would have something like the fifth largest world economy. Remember the Sutton rule? Wait until the waste fraud and abuse investigations reach California.

As far as local interest and government involvement in our lives, there is a concern by some of our readership about large data centers and their potential effects in Montgomery County. The timing is a little tough compared to our print schedule. We will be watching the story as it unfolds and may have some clearer details for our March issue.

Turning to the production side of things, on page 16 is a story that promotes the value of having our breeding bulls examined and confirmed fit for service. I found the data shared here was useful for context. Then, shortly this time of year several bull sales will be in the offering. To prepare we have a story on page 8 that goes through some benchmarks to valuing a good bull to a commercial operation. So what do you spend on purchasing a herd sire? I found the article from OSU Extension useful.

Then on the maternal side of things, a reader forwarded news of triplets on page 12! Triplets in cows is very rare, but to have all three survive is rarer yet. If this was a more common occurrence, we could tackle our small cattle inventory a good bit faster and more efficient.

ly!

Elsewhere among these pages, we have several other opportunities for good reading. As always, Carolyn's barn story is of historical interest. Bill Bullard's column talks about the division of where the value of beef is distributed. Lee Pitts tells a story on our late friend Baxter Black that shouldn't be missed.

I found the watermelon story on page 14 enlightening. I am drawn to reading about all kinds of specialty crops, and I have often commented to my neighbors how I wish they would figure out something besides corn and soybeans because of the monotony of it!

As we are finishing up this issue, the weather man is predicting a strong winter storm. Storm prep is a high priority. If it comes like I think it will, keep us in mind for reader submissions next month. We enjoy sharing ranch-y photos from triplets to cattle in snowstorms, drop us a letter or email us with a few of the details! Of course, this suggestion of reader input is not just for storm season, but good all year 'round.

Be careful out there, and as always thank you for reading and your continued support.

Beef breakthrough: China resumes Canadian imports while U.S. waits

China will resume importing beef from Canada for the first time in five years, Canadian Agriculture Minister Heath MacDonald announced recently.

"China has restored market access for Canadian beef, lifting the suspension that had been in place since December 2021," he wrote on social media.

The announcement follows the conclusion of a wide-ranging trade agreement last week in Beijing between Chinese leader Xi Jinping and Canadian Prime Minister Mark Carney.

Beef sales to China are expected to resume immediately. "We know that there's a large company that's shipping its first load of beef to China next week," MacDonald said.

China banned imports of Canadian beef after the occurrence of an "atypical" case of bovine spongiform encephalopathy (aBSE) on a farm in the Canadian province of Alberta.

Before the ban, China was Canada's fourth largest destination for beef exports. In the year preceding the import cessation, China purchased 20,045 metric tons (mt) of beef from Canada worth \$193 million, according to the Canada Beef Annual Report 2021/2022.

Canada becomes another potential competitor in China for U.S. beef exporters, who have been locked out of the market since Beijing declared U.S. facilities' export registrations expired in 2025. Similar measures against U.S. pork and poultry exporters were reversed within days, but the halt to beef exports has lingered despite a short-term

trade deal between Xi and U.S. President Donald Trump.

Beef exports were not specified in the Xi-Carney agreement, which focused primarily on the removal of Chinese tariffs on Canadian agri-food products, especially Canola seeds, peas and seafood, in return for Canada easing barriers to Chinese electric car imports, the CBC reported.

"We are pleased to see renewed access into China, one of the largest export markets for beef. Every market matters to Canadian beef farmers and ranchers; it supports our industry's resilience and growth," Canadian Cattle Association President Tyler Fulton said in a statement.

"Canadian beef continues to be sought after because it is among the highest quality beef in the world and we appreciate the advocacy of both Prime Minister Carney and our Minister of Agriculture, Heath MacDonald."

While the news was good for Canada's beef producers, the Canadian pork industry still faces a 25% tariff imposed in 2024 by Beijing in retaliation for tariffs on Chinese electric vehicles.

Nevertheless, pork producers see the détente between the two countries as a hopeful sign, after years of tense relations over both trade, geopolitics and security issues.

Canadian Pork Council President Stephen Heckbert welcomed the "renewed dialogue with one of Canada's largest trading partners."

- Meatingplace.com



DIRECTORY OF ADVERTISERS

F&T Livestock Market	page 2
Missouri Select Genetics Sale	page 3
Hopewell Farms	page 5
Mississippi Valley Angus Assoc.	page 5
Hamilton Hay	page 6
The Bank of Missouri	page 7
Bowling Green Vet Clinic	page 7
Beefland	page 7
Larry Clementz Real Estate	page 7
Hall Seed & Chemical	page 8
Bruce Fencing	page 9
Scotland Co. Livestock Auction	page 9
Callaway Livestock Center	page 10
Cattle Visions	page 10
Boyd Harris	page 11
Maxwell Trailers	page 11
Rhodes Angus Sale	page 12
Miller Brothers Lumber	page 12
Missouri Beef Industry Council	page 12
Meyers Truck Service	page 13
Zuroweste Welding	page 13
Girod Construction	page 13
Hatton Vermeer Sales	page 14
Purina	page 14
Andras Red Angus Bull Sale	page 15
Meyer Implement	page 15
Ridgway Seed & Soil	page 15
Circle 5 Beef	page 16
Eastern Mo. Cowboy Church	page 16
Angell Livestock	page 18
EMCC market report	page 18
Sheep & Goat market report	page 19
Angell-Thomas Charolais	page 20
Angell's Western Wear	page 20
Albert's Shoe Repair	page 20
Cary Livestock	page 20
CYS Builders	page 20
Nation Polled Herefords	page 20
Shannon Farms	page 20
SHek Boutique	page 20
Mark Robertson	page 20
Savannah's Farm Fresh	page 20
Central Mo. Feed & Supply	page 22
Angell's Western Wear	pages 22, 23
Eastern Mo. Commission. Co.	page 24

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Jon Angell, Publisher

**Justin Angell, Contributing Writer
Carolyn Allen, Contributing Writer**

**Chuck Herron, Virtual Images
Production & Design**

You may send news and advertising
information directly to Chuck Herron at:

**Virtual Images Publications & Design
P.O. Box 26 • Paris, MO 65275
660-327-1009
E-mail: cattlemans@virtualimages.us
www.cattlemansadvocate.com**

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For news information,
contact Chuck Herron at:

**Virtual Images
P.O. Box 26 • Paris, MO 65275
660-327-1009
E-mail: cattlemans@virtualimages.us**

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FARM & FOOD FILE

Can someone give rural America some love?

By ALAN GUEBERT
For The Cattleman's Advocate

President Donald J. Trump loves to point out that farmers "love" him. The Nov. 2024 election results prove it's no boast.

In fact, while the then-former president beat Vice President Kamala Harris by a slim 1.5 percent nationally, he crushed her by 40 points, 69 percent to 29 percent, in rural America. In "farm-dependent counties," Trump walloped Harris by a 78-to-22 margin.

But as big as those lovely totals were in 2024, the President didn't return much affection to rural voters in 2025. Farm inputs, health care, and food costs continued to rise; yo-yo tariff policies sliced ag exports; and cuts to several federal farm and rural programs clipped rural communities.

For example, the Administration's shutdown of the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID), America's biggest overseas food aid program, ended government purchases of "about \$2 billion worth of food from American farmers annually" for the Food for Peace program.



Farm inputs, health care, and food costs continued to rise; yo-yo tariff policies sliced ag exports; and cuts to several federal farm and rural programs clipped rural communities.

Losing a \$2 billion-a-year customer in your backyard is bad, but an internal USAID memo estimated the program's shutdown also meant an additional 1 million children worldwide would suffer from malnutrition while another 160,000 would die from malaria and 200,000 would become paralyzed by polio.

Domestically, USAID's shutdown will be felt by farmers for decades. USAID funded 17 ag innovation labs on 13 university campuses, 12 at Land Grants. Eighty-three percent of that funding, however, was cut by DOGE, or the Department of Government Efficiency.

"By killing these programs," one ag researcher told the New Yorker magazine, "...(y)ou're setting farmers up to not have the tools they need to survive in a changing world."

Then there's the cuts to other vital USDA (Department of Agriculture) programs like the "one that funds the purchase of local farm-fresh foods for school cafeterias and another that funds much of the product available in food banks." Together they amount "to more than \$1 billion in purchasing."

USDA also cut the \$3 billion Climate Smart Commodities Program that funded "projects... to improve soil health, sequester carbon, reduce methane emissions, and encourage other climate-friendly farming practices."

The reason, explained

Secretary Brooke Rollins, "was (the program) was largely built to advance the green new scam at the benefit of NGOs—non-governmental organizations—"not American farmers."

That's nonsense. The Climate Smart program—like the local spending for USAID and federal purchases of local food for schools and food banks—have a direct economic impact on farm markets and rural communities. Those billions will be irreplaceable in farm country.

These losses will be amplified in 2026 and 2027 when deep cuts contained in the so-called "big beautiful bill" hit both SNAP, the nation's key nutrition assistance program used by one in seven rural Americans, and Medicaid, the health care program 24 percent of rural Americans depend on.

Those cuts—estimated at \$186 billion for SNAP and \$100 billion for Medicaid—not only mean less food and medical care for hungry and sick Americans, they also remove any lasting, beneficial impact both programs have on local economies.

For example, every \$1 spent on SNAP generates, on average, \$1.65 in the local economy. As such, if coming SNAP cuts reduce rural benefits by \$28 billion (15 percent of total cuts), then rural communities nationwide can expect local economic activity to drop—not by \$28 billion but by \$46 billion, a crushing loss that's impossible to replace.

Now add in coming Medicaid cuts, their lost economic impact, a shaky farm economy, stagnant commodity prices, and today's still inexplicable tariff policies and farmers and their "farm-dependent counties" will need a lot of love in 2026 and beyond.

Right now, however, it's not coming from the White House.

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The Farm and Food File is published weekly throughout the U.S. and Canada. Past columns, supporting documents, and contact information are posted at farmandfoodfile.com

National survey looks at beef producers' bull-buying decisions

A new national survey aims to better understand how beef producers make bull-buying decisions and how extension programs can better support those producers.

The survey is being conducted by eBEEF, a nationwide network of extension specialists in beef cattle genetics, including University of Missouri Extension's Jamie Courter. The survey focuses on bull and semen selection practices, breeding goals and the challenges producers face when making genetic decisions.

This survey is designed specifically for beef producers who make genetic selection decisions on their operations. Results will guide extension education, training and research related to beef genetics, Courter said.

"The best way to understand the needs of the beef industry is to hear from them directly," he said. "Better understanding the needs and ideas of Missouri beef producers and those across the U.S. will help all extension professionals better serve the industry. It will drive research projects and extension materials for the foreseeable future, until it's time

to ask these same questions again."

Producers who complete the survey and provide an email address may enter a drawing for one of five \$100 gift cards sponsored by the Beef Improvement Federation.

Complete the survey at <https://muext.us/eBeefSurvey>.

For more information, contact Courter at jcourter@missouri.edu.

31st Anniversary Sale

Mississippi Valley Angus Association

Saturday
March 21, 2026
6:30 p.m.
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Meat prices jumped 9.2% in 2025: CPI update

The meat index within the government's consumer price index finished December 9.2% higher than a year ago, driven by a 16.4% jump in beef and veal prices, according to the latest Consumer Price Index update from the Bureau of Labor Statistics.

The overall food index rose 3.1% in 2025, including 0.6% in December, or 0.7% seasonally adjusted. The food-at-home index, which roughly correlates with grocery prices, was 2.4% higher for the year, including an increase last month of 0.5%, or 0.7% seasonally adjusted.

Within the food-at-home index for 2025, the increase in meat prices was second among major categories only to brewed beverages, which jumped 11.8% driven by tariff-related coffee prices. Food-at-home is about 8% of CPI, while meat is nearly 1% including beef and veal constituting just over half of the meat index.

Food away from home, which collects restaurant and food service categories, rose 0.7% in December, with and without seasonal adjustment, and 4.1% for the calendar year.

Food away from home is 5.7% of the overall CPI.

Overall consumer prices rose in December by 0.3%, seasonally adjusted, and 2.7% for the last 12 months. With the government's October and November inflation data scuttled by the federal shutdown, the December index suggests an annualized increase of 1.6% for the last three months, showing a modest easing of consumer inflation.

For December, meat prices declined 0.1%, but were 0.6% higher with seasonal adjustment.

Within the meat index, the beef and veal category, despite the 16.4% 12-month increase, saw prices rise just 0.4% in December, or 1% seasonally adjusted.

Uncooked ground beef prices rose 15.5% last year, and 0.2% in December with and without seasonal adjustment.

Uncooked beef roasts jumped 17.5% last year but were down in December by 2.3%, a decline of 1.6% seasonally adjusted.

Uncooked beef steaks soared 17.8% last year, including a December increase of 2.2%, or 3.1% seasonally adjusted.

Uncooked other beef and veal rose 15.3% last year, with a December decline of 0.2%, with and without seasonal adjustment.

— Meatingplace.com

Here are the scheduled advertising deadlines for The Cattleman's Advocate through June 2026:

March issue	Ad deadline: February 16
April issue	Ad deadline: March 16
May issue	Ad deadline: April 13
June issue	Ad deadline: May 13

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Thoughts From Justin's Side of the Fence

By JUSTIN ANGELL

Wow, what a month to be a seller! Spring 2026 has started out with the hottest calf sales in history. Although not confirmed, I've heard from more than one source that on several different occasions in different locations, order buyer's buying cards have actually burst into flames. I've also read that Brinks security transportation service is expanding into grazing calf hauling. But the most astounding thing that I've heard is after selling calves and paying all bills many Cowboys are actually making enough money to completely pay off bank notes!

(Reviewing my article, out loud, Miss Kelly says under her breath, "paying off notes? Really? Must be everybody but you." I just smile and think to myself... You just wait smarty-pants.)

If the mail doesn't fail, hopefully you all get this in time to see the advertising for the F&T High Noon Cow Sale February 3rd. Besides bred cows, bred heifers and spring pairs, we will have a tremendous selection of 3-in-1 pairs. Cattle markets should be good for at least another year; so with these bred females, you will have the opportunity to sell at least two calves at very high prices. After that, we'll have to re-evaluate our position. A lot more positive outcomes than negative looking down the road.

With the conversion of the food pyramid, beef is back to the top where it belongs. This alone could generate enough extra beef demand to consume everything we produce for years at an elevated price.

I will take this opportunity after that rousing peptalk to bring a note of caution to the conversation. These elevated prices, I see in my own operation and in

others, a loosening of the frugal belt. A little bit of extra everything often does have some return on investment, but there will be a day when we will all have to bear down again.

Just briefly, I wanted to draw something to everyone's attention that I have not seen mentioned anywhere else. The Mexican border is still closed. That is a problem because I see history repeating itself. Sometime in the 70s, we had the soybean embargo and the response from the world was Brazil. Before that, Brazil was just a Third World country, but after we became an unreliable supplier, China predominantly moved their demand toward a new ag startup called Brazil. If we don't start letting those Mexican cattle in, I can foresee a feedlot infrastructure being developed south of the border. Selling high-quality beef to the world is a lot more profitable than selling corn to feed lots in Mexico.

Tiptoeing into a subject I'm not real comfortable with, especially in Northeast Missouri/Western Illinois, is cow size. Watching the pound cow sale has been eye-opening for me. I'm sure salvage day for jumbo cows is a good day, but I'm thinking 1800 to 2300 pound fat cows eat enough extra feed to consume the equivalent of one calf they've raised. I will admit the genetic potential of these cow's progeny can fully be expressed now because there's no carcass weight limit. Average carcass weight in the United States is almost 1000 pounds! I believe we're all safe and good for a few more years, but at some point when we start talking about profitability, fertility is number one and limiting input cost is number two in many cowherd profitability studies.

I've always tried to put information in



my articles that both entertain and educate, but my main priority is trying to put information in these articles that will make you money. One other thing I've noticed watching DV Auction and the sale in Palmyra is the high number of cows that go through the ring without being pregnancy tested. One man's trash is another man's treasure, and with the way the markets are, if you have a cow that you are finished with, you might add hundreds of dollars of value by pregging, because if she is bred, I guarantee you there's about five people that are gonna want to try her... I'll be one of them. This includes cows that are cranky, semi blind or kind of crippled. If those cows are second or third period, somebody is going to buy them to take home to get one more calf. If a beautiful, but a little bit thin, five year-old third period trophy cow immaculately struts into the ring without a story, I would be very anxious, wondering why she's there and wondering why anybody would be selling that cow... something must be terribly wrong?

A decent old cow that comes into the ring with long toes on one back foot, a blue eye and a little bit cranky... I could buy with confidence because I know why she's there. Now that I think about it, when I married Kelly and she has two blue eyes, two flat feet and is often pre-coffee cranky. She was fine after I got her home, a true bargain. So just like bringing a good home, this marriage has worked out great.... until maybe she reads this.

Pregnancy test all your cows unless they are huge jumbo kill cows or for sure open.

For those of you who would like to contribute to Dr. Lehenbauer's retirement fund directly, I will be taking cash donations every Tuesday on the steps going into the ring. I'll be sure he gets most of it.

People often ask me what the plan

should be for 2026. I thought the grass cattle were too high for two years, but both years they have made a tremendous amount of money. Who's to say it won't happen again?

The safer bet for grazing as always will be cows and pairs. Take the High Noon Cow Sale coming up for example. How about some optimistic hillbilly math! A four-year-old first period cow could be valued at \$3200. A 400 pound calf could be valued at \$2000. Logic says the pair should be worth \$5200, but look at this. By the time grass gets here, a 400 pound calf will be gaining 2 pounds a day with a value of four dollars per pound.

75 days X 2 pounds per day X \$4 equals \$600 increase in value for the calf, plus another \$200 as the cow moves from 1st to 2nd period. My point is that at \$6000 a pair, those 3 in 1 pairs are not \$800 too high. They are only 75 days too high. When the grass comes, it will be positive, especially compared to the grass growing up and falling over, or where she had more unneeded hay being baled. By the way, I know there is expense to get them to grass, but in true cowboy optimistic hillbilly fashion, I'm not counting interest, hay that is going to rot if I don't feed it to something or my labor.

Remember, I work for the seller and I'm being optimistic.

The cattle market is fantastic, everybody I talk to is happy and the sun is shining on a brisk clear winter morning. I could ramble on, but everything else I have to say about the market at all time highs you see and hear every day, so I won't beat that dead horse.

All I can say is we deal with uncertainty every day and that's part of the job. No matter what, don't let them steal the joy of these profitable moments. The countdown has begun. We're only 70 days to grass!

So that's all I've got for this month. I hope to see you at the auction!

Got an idea for a story you'd like to see in The Advocate? Drop us a line and let us know at: cattlemansadv@parismo.net

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It's The Pitts...

Why Baxter became a poet

By LEE PITTS
For The Cattleman's Advocate

I know you join me in saying that I sure do miss Baxter Black. He was the most interesting man I ever met and I always looked forward to his phone calls, his column and the many appearances I was fortunate to attend. I'm proud to have called him a close friend.

But there's one thing I always wondered. Why someone who trained so long and worked so hard to become a doctor, a highly paid and distinguished veterinarian, would give it all up just to appear on the Chuck Woolery Show? The great mystery was solved for me when I ran into a couple of Baxter's old running mates. They worked for Baxter when he was Dr. Black and after I promised to pay them royalties they explained why Baxter gave up the glamorous life of a veterinarian to become the greatest cowboy poet ever.

Dale and Earl worked with Baxter when they were all employed by J.R. Simplot based in Idaho. Dale and Earl were cowboys and Dr. Black was the distinguished veterinarian for the sprawling outfit. According to Earl, life for Baxter wasn't always banquets and book signings. "Baxter put himself through vet college by giving haircuts, tooling beautiful leather belts and by playing his unique brand of music. Baxter would play for anybody who would listen," recalled Earl. "Life was hard for the starving artist and he was

He was the most interesting man I ever met and I always looked forward to his phone calls, his column and the many appearances I was fortunate to attend.

forced to live on a steady diet of canned tomatoes and Black Velvet."

Life didn't get any easier once Bax got a Dr. in front of his name. "I remember one case in particular," recalled Earl. "Our job that day was to treat 300 head of scouring calves and Baxter showed up for work sicker than the calves. He had the flu, I guess, either that or the wrong mixture of Velvet and tomatoes. On top of that he was trying to quit chewing. And to think a guy would give all that up just to become a regular on the Tonight Show, have female groupies throw their room keys at him and have people beg for his autograph. It must have been a real sacrifice on his part," said Earl.

There were other instances during his ten years at Simplot that led Baxter to believe there was more to life than preg checking and foot rot. Like the time he was told to go out and worm the Palomino horse on one occasion and the sorrel on another. Then the bay and the roan. "When it was all over Baxter had wormed the same horse four times," said Earl. "They all looked the same to him."

Perhaps the episode that convinced Baxter that his real calling was on stage was during calving season on one of the Simplot Ranches. As Earl recalled, "The work was nonstop but like always, Baxter always made it a little more fun. He was always

singing and entertaining even when we were working. He was a great guy to work for and there was plenty of work," recalled Earl. "I'll never forget the time we had a heifer that broke her pelvis trying to calve. Dr. Black saved her and for a month he nursed her back to health. A more dedicated Doctor you never saw. After a month of intensive care the heifer was improving steadily when another heifer broke her pelvis trying to calve. The boss, knowing how much time and energy Baxter had invested in saving the first heifer, told him that it was not worth the time and money and that Baxter should just shoot the latest heifer to split her pelvis.

"Of course this went against the grain of Baxter whose training had given him great respect for every living thing," recalled Earl. "So it was with a heavy heart that Baxter got the gun and went out to the calving shed. Under his breath Baxter said 'I'm sorry old gal.' He drew a bead with his well trained, diagnostic eye and then he pulled the trigger... and shot the wrong heifer! He had just killed the heifer he had spent an entire month doctoring back to health!"

It was shortly thereafter that Baxter decided to pursue a new line of work and both the animal kingdom, and all of us who loved him, were much better off because of it.

— www.LeePittsbooks.com

Police: Worker drowned in waste treatment tank

Drowning was the cause of death for an Abbyland Foods' worker in Abbotsford, Wis., local authorities said. Officers were called to the USDA-inspected plant at 7:35 a.m. January 14, according to a statement from the Colby-Abbotsford Police Department: "Upon arrival an officer was told that an employee fell into a dip tank in the waste treatment facility at Abbyland."

The victim was dead when recovered from the tank by fire and emergency medical personnel. The body was taken by the

Marathon County Medical Examiner's Office.

"Initial investigation has determined the death was not suspicious and at this time is determined to be a work-related incident," the police statement said. "The preliminary results of the autopsy by the Marathon County Medical Examiner's Office have indicated the death was a result of drowning."

Local authorities are still investigating. An OSHA investigation is also underway, accord-

ing to a local news report.

Meatingplace requests for comment from OSHA, local authorities and Abbyland Foods have not been returned.

OSHA previously noted Abbyland's "history of violations," most recently including alleged safety failures leading to two workers' suffering amputations in 2023. This, the agency said, followed "a decade of citations for nearly two dozen serious violations."

— Meatingplace.com

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Report 'cautious' about beef packer margins

The reduction in Tyson Foods' beef slaughter capacity and hopes for an eventual restoration of live cattle imports from Mexico are not enough for unbridled optimism about beef packer margins, according to a recent report from investment firm Stephens Inc.

"While we are encouraged by signs of heifer retention taking place, we still remain cautious around U.S. beef packer margins, given further supply tightness implied by heifer retention," according to the 2026 protein outlook, led by industry analyst Pooran Sharma.

Tyson's closure of its Lexington, Neb., harvest plant and dropping the second shift at the company's Amarillo, Texas, facility were due to be completed this month.

The Stephens report noted that the USDA's latest World Agricultural Supply and Demand Estimates (WASDE) projected cattle prices to be higher by mid-single digits during the course of the year.

"The combination of Lexington, Brazilian tariffs and Argentina's quota uplift had a negative impact on cattle futures from October-December, but we think supply tightness can renew price strength," the firm wrote.

The closure of the U.S. southern border to livestock imports due to Mexico's New World screwworm infestation continues, for now, taking about 3% of previous U.S. supply off the market, according to a Stephens estimate.

"The industry could see better-than-expected production should the pace of heifer retention not be as sharp as prior cycles and if Mexican cattle imports were to resume. Should these two items take place, margins could come in better than expected on higher-than-anticipated production," the report said. "The main reason we think the Lexington closure will not make a large impact to cattle bidding, is that industry utilization levels were already low to begin with and commentary suggests that remaining cattle buyers would remain aggressive with their bids."

— Meatingplace.com

More NWS cases reported in Mexico

The New Year has brought on a wave of New World Screwworm (NWS) cases in Mexico, with the southern state of Veracruz a key hotspot for the lingering outbreak.

USDA/APHIS reported four new NWS cases in Mexico on Jan. 5. Three of those cases occurred in Veracruz, with two

bovine cases and one case in swine, the first hog case since Dec. 11, also in Veracruz. Since Dec. 1, 82.5% of all NWS cases in Mexico have occurred in Veracruz, which borders the Gulf of Mexico and at its north-most point is about 324 miles from the Mexico/Texas border.

— Meatingplace.com

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What is a good bull worth in 2026?

As the 2026 bull-buying season kicks off, Mark Johnson estimates what a bull should be worth and the factors to consider

By MARK JOHNSON
Oklahoma State University Extension

With Cattlemen's Congress taking place in Oklahoma City Jan. 4-14, the spring 2026 bull-buying season has officially started. The full schedule of sales during Cattlemen's Congress can be found at <https://cattlemen-scogress.com/sales/>. Bull-buying season will continue into the spring months in Oklahoma and across the nation, with progressive seedstock operations offering yearling bulls. Accordingly, it's time to revisit the age-old question: What is a good bull worth in 2026?

As a student at Oklahoma State University (OSU) in the mid-1980s, I was taught: "A good bull is worth the value of five calves he sires." It is a good answer and a good rule of thumb. The problem is it doesn't exactly narrow the range. As always, we need to define "a good bull," check current market reports, answer some questions about how we intend to market future calf crops, and do some cowboy math to arrive at a more precise answer.

What is considered a good bull?

For this discussion, qualifications to meet good bull status are:

A bull that sells with a registration paper, which includes pedigree information and a complete set of genetic values [including expected progeny dif-

USDA dangles \$100M for innovations to fight New World Screwworm

The USDA's Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS) is offering up to \$100 million for innovations to help control and eradicate the New World Screwworm (NWS) infestation that has moved north through Mexico to threaten U.S. border regions.

Agriculture Secretary Brooke Rollins said the agency is looking for "the kinds of innovations that will help us stay ahead of this pest and protect our food supply and our economy," in a late Wednesday announcement, dubbed the grant initiative the New World screwworm "Grand Challenge." Grant applications are open until Feb. 23.

The livestock pest, which was pushed out of the Southwestern United States, and then Mexico and Central America through decades of concerted, U.S.-led multinational eradication work, including large scale releases of sterilized males to thwart breeding by female flies. Screwworm had been contained below the Isthmus of Panama since the early 2000s, but in 2022 the flies began appearing further north and in late 2024 were first spotted again in southern Mexico.

Due to the screwworm threat,

ferences (EPDs) and bio-economic indices] to be considered in the selection process.

A bull that has passed a breeding soundness exam (sometimes referred to as a BSE) and sells with a breeding soundness warranty (terms will vary).

A bull that will add value to calves sired because he fits your breeding objectives, production system and marketing plans.

Valuing the calves he'll produce

So, what is that good bull worth? When are we marketing our calves? What is their value?

Using the end of year market prices for 2025 from Derrell Peel's article in the Dec. 29, 2025, issue of the Cow-Calf Corner newsletter:

500-pound (lb.) weaned steer calves were worth about \$4.80 per lb. for a value of approximately \$2,400 per head. Therefore, if my future marketing plan is to sell weaned steers, \$2,400 x 5 = \$12,000 is the answer.

800-lb. yearling steers were worth about \$3.50 per lb. for a value of \$2,800 per head. Therefore, if my future marketing plan is to sell yearling steers, \$2,800 x 5 = \$14,000 is the answer.

1,500-lb. finished beef steers were worth \$2.29 per lb. live for a value of \$3,435 each. Therefore, if my future marketing plan is to retain ownership through finishing and sell fed cattle on a live-weight basis, \$3,435 x 5 = \$17,175 is the answer.

So, in the current market, a good bull is worth somewhere between \$12,000 and \$17,175 to a commercial cow-calf operation.

Where exactly in that range depends on your marketing plan and the market conditions at that

time. It's not an exact number because there are many variables in play.

One key point illustrated here is that the longer you own the offspring before marketing, the greater the value of the bull to your operation. Retained ownership gives you more time and opportunity to capture the value of your investment in genetics.

It is noteworthy that we haven't considered the value added to replacement females a bull will sire. Bulls used to sire the next generation of cows have an even greater long-term economic effect on the profit potential of your operation and should be valued accordingly.

I encourage cow-calf operations to consider their breeding goals, production system and marketing plan. Doing so should dictate where to apply selection pressure. Genetic values pay when you purchase bulls capable of improving genetic potential for the specific traits that will translate to added value at your intended marketing end point.

Editor's note: Mark Johnson is a beef cattle breeding specialist for Oklahoma State University Extension.

Town Hall meeting set for proposed 5,000-acre mega site in Montgomery County

MONTGOMERY COUNTY, Mo. – Community members will host a town hall meeting on January 29 at 7 p.m. in the Montgomery County High School Gymnasium. This will be an open forum to discuss the 5,000-acre proposed mega site in Montgomery County. Residents will be able to express their thoughts and concerns along with learning more information about the project. All residents are encouraged to attend to be informed about and have a voice in the future of Montgomery County. There will be a presentation of information with research conducted by citizens and experts, including groundwater and environmental geologist.

Currently, there are two proposed data center sites for Montgomery County, Projects Green and Spade. Project Green is an Amazon Web Services data center, projected to use around 1,000 acres on the north side of Interstate 70 between High Hill and New Florence. Montgomery County Commissioners approved a tax abatement on December 29, 2025, for Amazon Web Services. On the South side of I-70, Project Spade would use approximately 850 acres for another data center campus.

Concerns associated with the mega site include usage of resources including water and utilities, social impact, and lack of project transparency.

The January 29 town hall will be hosted by citizens. On December 8, 2025, the County held a town hall meeting that drew more than 500 people to answer questions regarding Project Green. Some felt questions and concerns were not properly addressed.

The town hall meeting is January 29, 2026 at 7 p.m. at 394 Highway 19, Montgomery City, MO 63361 (Montgomery County High School) and is organized by Preserve Montgomery County LLC.

MU Extension livestock and forage event set for Feb. 19 in Forsyth

FORSYTH, Mo. – University of Missouri Extension will host the 2026 Taney County Livestock and Forage Conference 5:30-8:30 p.m. Thursday, Feb. 19, at Forsyth High School, 178 Panther Road, Forsyth.

The free conference is designed to provide livestock producers with timely, practical information on herd management, forage systems and market

conditions as they plan for the year ahead, said Jake Hefley, MU Extension agricultural business specialist.

The program will include:

Black vultures. Chez Kleeman, USDA Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service.

Pasture renovation. Tim Schnakenberg, MU Extension field specialist in agronomy.

2026 cattle market outlook. Jake Hefley, MU Extension field

specialist in agricultural business.

Selecting and developing the right replacement heifers for your herd. Elizabeth Picking, MU Extension field specialist in livestock.

Registration is free. A meal will be provided.

Register at <https://pears.io/events/mu/2336>. For more information, contact Hefley at 417-546-4431 or jhefley@missouri.edu.



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Livestock News & Notes.....

JBS sells stake in Brazilian meat snack joint venture to Jack Link's

JBS has sold its 50% equity interest in a Brazil-based meat snack production venture to Link Snacks Inc. (LSI), which operates under the Jack Link's brand.

JBS confirmed the transaction in an email to Meatingplace recently.

The two companies formed the joint venture, Meat Snack Partners, in 2010 for the production and commercialization in Brazil of beef jerky and other shelf-stable, ready-to-eat meat snack products. JBS, which was founded in Brazil and became U.S. listed last year, supplied meat to two JBS-owned facilities operated through the joint venture in Santo Antonio de Posse and Lins, Brazil.

The sale was submitted to Brazilian antitrust regulator CADE for review.

"This transaction reflects JBS's disciplined approach to capital allocation and its focus on strengthening its global, diversified food platform," the company said.

Jack Link's did not respond to a message from Meatingplace.

Tyson Lexington plant stops some shifts ahead of permanent closure

Tyson Foods stopped some production shifts this week at its Lexington, Neb., beef plant, according to a Tyson spokesperson, as the company moved closer to the facility's planned permanent closure later this month.

The company announced in November that it would permanently close the Lexington plant on Jan. 20. The facility stopped B Shift Harvest on Jan. 2 and will stop A Shift Harvest Wednesday. The plant is still processing up to the closing date and all employees will be paid up to Jan. 20.

An analysis by the University of Nebraska-Lincoln estimated the annual statewide economic impact of the closure at \$3.28 billion. The plant, which opened in 1990 in a converted tractor factory, employed about 3,200 workers and had the capacity to slaughter up to 5,000 head of cattle per day, or roughly 4.8% of total daily U.S. beef slaughter, according to the university.

The shutdown is expected to deliver a major economic blow to Lexington, a town of roughly 11,000 residents, with ripple effects across Nebraska. UNL projected total annual labor income losses of \$530.43 million tied to the elimination of 7,003 jobs statewide. That figure included 3,212 positions directly lost at the plant, along with additional jobs affected in supporting industries and local services.

Tax revenues were also expected to decline sharply. UNL estimated annual losses of \$23.2 million in state personal income tax revenue following the clo-

sure. State sales tax collections were projected to fall by \$10.16 million per year, while local sales tax revenues accruing to Dawson County were expected to drop by about \$2.77 million annually.

Maple Leaf Foods expects to expand its US 'reach' in 2026

Maple Leaf Foods Inc. is forecasting "mid-single digit" revenue growth this year, with the Canadian meat processor citing strategies including a bigger role in the U.S. market amid consumers' strengthening protein demand.

In its 2026 financial guidance this week, in which a dividend increase was announced, Maple Leaf said that it is executing on "proven" growth strategies including "leveraging leadership in Sustainable Meats, investing in our portfolio of consumer-leading brands, accelerating the pace of impactful innovation, expanding reach in the U.S. market, and deeper integration into customer strategies."

Capital investment for the year is slated at C\$160 million-C\$180 million for maintenance and productivity improvements, including technology and automation intended to fuel

future growth.

In the last quarterly report in November, the company said it expected to implement price hikes in 2026. Maple Leaf last year completed the spinoff of Canada Packers Inc., which contains the parent company's pork business.

Maple Leaf President Curtis Frank said that the dividend was increasing for the 11th consecutive year.

"Our 2026 outlook captures the momentum and operational strength we've built through the consistent execution of our strategic blueprint and the resilience of our leading brands," he said.

"Looking ahead, our disciplined approach to operational execution and capital allocation positions us to deliver sustained organic growth, reinvest in our business and pursue strategic opportunities as we advance our vision to be the most sustainable protein company on earth."

Brashears retakes helm at USDA's Office of Food Safety

Dr. Mindy Brashears was sworn in recently as the USDA's under secretary for food safety, resuming the role she held from 2020-21 in the first Trump

administration, including oversight of the Food Safety and Inspection Service (FSIS).

President Donald Trump named her to the post in June. The Senate Agriculture Committee sent the nomination in November to the full chamber, where Brashears was confirmed on December 18 on a slate of 97 administration nominees, in a 53-43 Senate vote along party lines with four Democrats absent. It was the third tranche of nominees confirmed last year, after the Republican majority changed Senate rules to allow appointees to be voted on as a group.

A PhD food scientist and professor and Director of the International Center for Food Industry Excellence at Texas Tech University, Brashears took the oath of office from Secretary of Agriculture Brooke Rollins.

"Under Dr. Brashears' leadership in the Office of Food Safety, FSIS will continue to advance its core mission of safeguarding

public health while enhancing these efforts through the implementation of Secretary Rollins' five-point plan to bolster food safety," USDA said in a statement Friday.

In her November confirmation hearing, Brashears said that reducing salmonella illnesses is one of her top priorities, explaining that during her previous stint at USDA, she rolled out a salmonella "roadmap" founded on making data-based and science-based decisions. She acknowledged there has been little movement in terms of reducing salmonella illnesses since then, but said technology has advanced to help rapidly identify the most pathogenic strains.

Many of the preceding items were taken from Meatingplace.com

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Sale Schedule

Special Cattle Sale

Tuesday, Feb. 3 @ 12:30 a.m.

Dairy Sale

Tuesday, Feb. 10 @ 10:30 a.m.

Special Cattle Sale

Tuesday, Feb. 17 @ 12:30 a.m.

Regular Cattle Sale with Hay Auction

Tuesday, Feb. 24 @ 12:30 a.m.

Hay Sale @ 11:30

Longtime Paris community leader and cattleman, Chuck Brazeale, passes away

Charles Richard Brazeale

Charles R. (Chuck) Brazeale (LTC, Retired) died Tuesday, December 30, 2025 at the age of 90 in Columbia, MO where he was rehabbing from a fall in early September. He was born to Walter Page and Iva Jane (Skaggs) Brazeale at home in rural Ozark, Missouri on November 3, 1935; the third of five children. He grew up working on the family dairy farm and played in the school band. He graduated from Ozark High School in 1953, and enrolled at the University of Missouri where he was active in Army ROTC and received his B.S. in Agriculture in 1957.

Following graduation, Chuck spent the next 20 years in the U.S. Army, reaching the rank of Lieutenant Colonel. His service included two tours of duty flying helicopters in Vietnam, multiple transfers in the U.S. and abroad, as well as spending four years assigned to the Pentagon and three years teaching at the U.S. Defense College at Fort Leavenworth, KS. During a brief assignment to the St. Louis area, Chuck met the love of his life, Ina Rae Barklage. They married just nine months later on December 22, 1963.

Upon his retirement from the Army, Chuck completed a MBA at Northwest Missouri State University and moved with his family to Paris, Missouri where they built a home and life over the last 48 years. There was no better day for Chuck than spending time on his farm with the cattle and finding a fence that needed some attention. He was also a lifelong runner; enjoying his



daily walks/jogs, as well as running hundreds of 5K races and coordinating a relay team in the Go St. Louis marathon for many years.

Chuck started his second career in banking as a clerk/teller at The Paris National Bank (now TPNB Bank) in 1979. He served as President from 1985 until his retirement in 2011, but continued to serve on the bank board (as chairman until last year). Chuck was also an active member of the Missouri Bankers Association, serving as chairman in 2006. He also served on the Federal Home Loan Bank board and as a director for Midwest Independent Bank for several

years. He was a passionate advocate for TPNB Bank and local community banks across Missouri.

In addition to his professional life, Chuck served in various capacities in the Paris community; including serving on the board of the Chamber of Commerce and with various economic development efforts in the region, as a director of the Monroe County Water Supply District #2, one term on the local school board, supporter of Christmas is Caring, and many other endeavors. He especially enjoyed watching the Paris FFA students thrive, and was a 45+ year member of the Paris Rotary

Club.

Chuck was a man of faith. He and Ina Rae are long-time members of the First Baptist Church in Paris, where Chuck taught Sunday School, served as a deacon, sang in the choir, was the financial secretary for 40+ years, and was the unofficial door greeter every Sunday.

When he wasn't at church or on the farm, you could probably find Chuck at Mizzou. He was a True Son! Chuck was honored with a Faculty and Alumni Award from the university in 2024, and was just completing a term as chairman of the Mizzou Flagship Council. Ina Rae and Chuck were blessed to be able to establish the Brazeale Family Scholarships benefitting students in the College of Agriculture, Food, and Natural Resources (CAFNR) from Monroe and surrounding counties. Chuck also enjoyed the thrill of many Tiger athletics victories... and suffered with them in their defeats! MIZ!

Chuck was preceded in death by his parents, his brother Joe

Brazeale, and grandson Hunter Keeling.

He is survived by his wife of 62 years, Ina Rae Brazeale of Paris; one son, Charles W. Brazeale (Carol) of St. Louis; one daughter, Mary O'Leary (Matt Dorsey) of Columbia, IL; grandchildren, Dak Keeling (Kayla Throne) and Olivia Whetstone of St. Louis, Joshua O'Leary, Zachary O'Leary, and Meghan O'Leary of Columbia, IL; two great-grandsons, Ezra Whetstone and Henry Keeling; his beloved sisters, Gena Liner, Rachel Robertson, and Ruth Faerber; and a host of cousins, nieces, nephews, and other family.

Chuck's quiet, steady presence will be missed most of all by his family, but also by many other friends and associates. He blessed us all. Those who knew Chuck understood his great desire to be early when he was going anywhere. Given that knowledge, if you will be attend-

See BRAZEALE, page 14

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USDA FRAUD from page 1

ture, deep experience, and assets exceeding \$20 million with Wells Fargo.

Fisher, later pinched by the feds and sentenced to 10 years, fessed up. "In order for us to establish the business, I assisted in creating falsified financial statements, falsified resumes, and falsified other background documents between our company, so that we could get a USDA approval from the United States, in order for us to do loans for the USDA."

USDA certification in hand, Patel went into chop-shop overdrive, forging 26 USDA loans, ranging in value from \$2.5 million to \$10 million, for a total of \$179 million. The 26 loans, polished with bogus USDA employee signatures, fictitious borrower names, and fake USDA loan ID numbers, were a fantasy and had no government backing.

Patel then dangled the \$179-million package—a criminally audacious move considering he had no prior felony history. (Patel did have previous misdemeanor convictions in 2011 and 2012, for DUI and assault on a police officer, both of which resulted in short sentences of home confinement.)

First to sniff Patel's bait was Pennant Management, an investment company in Milwaukee, Wisc. Not willing dupes, but painfully deficient in the vetting department, Pennant reps flew to Florida and were wooed by Patel's silver-tongued claims that First Farmers stood atop \$52 million in assets, \$17 million in cash, and a profit line of \$1.8 million. All lies.

Patel further impressed Pennant with counterfeit balance sheets for 2011, 2012, and a portion of 2013. Pennant was willing to buy the \$179-million package deal. After all, the bundle was almost entirely guaranteed by USDA, according to Patel, who later wrote to Pennant with third-person bravado: "Effectively Nik Patel serves as a one man loan committee—reviewing the opportunities as they flow into him for consideration."

To ensure Pennant officials didn't smell the ruse, Patel ginned up "audited financial statements," for 2013, prepared by esteemed CPA "Geoff Kane." However, Kane, despite a glowing biography provided by Patel, was a fiction. Kane was Patel.

In for a dime, in for a dollar. Pennant jumped headfirst and snatched the \$179-million offer, wiring the funds to Patel at BMO Harris Bank in Florida.

NWS from page 1

livestock in Tamaulipas had been transported, raising worries that the flies are reproducing and spreading on their own.

Miller said that Texas livestock producers should be "checking livestock every day and treating any wound as a potential entry point." Several of the recent Tamaulipas cases were in calves just days old, which is suggestive of clas-



FEDERAL FRAUD: Nik Patel steered a chain of astonishing agriculture-related scams and racked up a 52-year



sentence in the pen. Where did Patel's stolen money go? In a hole; offshore; Dubai; family? (Photos public domain)

Cha-ching. Patel hit the fast lane, dumping tens of millions of dollars on hotel projects, a lavish \$4-million home, a Rolls-Royce and Lamborghini, boats, custom suits, jewelry, part ownership of a jet, international vacations, cathouse visits to a favored brothel in Panama—according to prosecutors, and political donations, even opening his home to host a fundraiser for then Florida Gov. Rick Scott.

Patel was just warming up.

Dubai Diamonds

In September 2014, Pennant got curious. After finding address inconsistencies in First Farmers' paperwork, Pennant knocked on USDA's door with a list of borrower names and loan numbers. USDA's response was damning: Total sham. Name and numbers do not exist.

Panicked, Pennant ran to the FBI. Too little, too late, for the Milwaukee-based investment advisor business. Pennant collapsed the following year.

On Sept. 29, 2014, the feds filed a criminal complaint against First Farmers and Patel. In 2015, he was arraigned in the Northern District of Illinois and pleaded not guilty. However, on Dec. 6, 2016, Patel changed his plea to guilty on five counts of wire fraud. Sentencing was scheduled for April 6, 2017.

In the interim, unfazed by the inconvenience of criminal prosecution, Patel continued spending. He dropped \$23,368 on a ski trip and approximately \$30,000 on his daughter's birthday party at a Four Seasons Hotel. And all the while, as he feigned remorse and awaited sentencing, Patel's second fraud was in motion. In public, he played the penitent and announced a desire to recover money for his victims, requesting—and receiving—

sentencing date extensions to generate cash.

Behind the outward contrition, Patel was managing the clock, stretching time to organize the second scheme, this time another hoodwink of USDA, along with Farmer Mac, to scam investors in Iowa. While final sentencing for the first fraud was delayed until Jan. 9, 2018, Patel went into overdrive, intending to make another pile of coin and go on the lam.

Starting back in June 2017, he had invented the alias of "Ron Elias," a fictitious "Vice President of Guaranteed Lending" at Banco Do Brasil (BDB). In reality, there was no such position at BDB and the bank never engaged in USDA lending, but Patel, correctly, predicted nobody would check.

According to DOJ, Patel's USDA-Farmer Mac con job was three-layered:

JBS from page 1

follow all employment and labor laws and take our responsibilities to our workforce seriously. Our employees choose to work with us, understand the terms of their employment, and are free to leave at any time."

In 2024, JBS said it put new HR leaders in place at the facility and added new recruitment training programs to ensure teams follow JBS' hiring compliance policies. "We are also working with the UFCW International to educate prospective and current team members about our hiring policies enterprise wide," the com-

"First, Patel fabricated fraudulent loan documents that falsely represented that a bank in Miami had authorized loans to be made to convert hotels in rural areas into assisted living facilities. Although the bank in Miami exists, it had never made any of the loans ... Second, Patel applied to USDA to guarantee the fake loans pursuant to its Business and Industry Guaranteed Loan Program. Third, after the USDA agreed to guarantee the fake loans, Patel sold the guaranteed portion of the fake loans to the Federal Agricultural Mortgage Corporation, also known as Farmer Mac. Patel executed the scheme on three occasions, receiving almost \$20 million in proceeds. Patel used a portion of the funds from that scheme to pay some of his restitution, but he was saving much of it to flee the United States."

Pocketing \$20 million as Ron Elias while on supervised federal release, thanks to loan guarantees provided by USDA and a wad of cash courtesy of Farmer Mac, Patel then applied for political asylum in India and Ecuador, claiming to be a victim of abuse and persecution by DOJ. Palm up, Ecuador accepted. In the months prior to sentencing, Patel lined up a chartered flight, luxury vehicles, \$500,000 in emergency cash, beautiful home, private chef, and schools for his daughters in Ecuador.

Partnered with another business crony, Kevin Timirchand, Patel aimed to launder

See USDA FRAUD, page 19

pany said. "JBS does not charge team members or applicants for any pre-employment services, including transportation, application, pre-hire medical requirements, or housing, nor do we require them to live in any specific location."

"Any allegations of poor living conditions are unacceptable and upsetting. We want all of our employees to have access to safe housing and the opportunity to create a better life for themselves and their families."

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Red meat consumption is trendy, but...

By TRENT LOOS
Special to the Advocate
Courtesy of High Plains Journal

As we sit here ringing in the year 2026, it seems wise to take a moment and consider the biggest agricultural news story for 2025. To me, without question, it is the beef business. Cattlemen finally have the opportunity to get a price for cattle that is needed to match the ever-growing costs of production. For the record, most of that cost is land and taxes. We also learned that one statement from DC can create a tremendous amount of anxiety despite what the fundamentals of the market are. But there is more to this Red Meat story than just beef.

As we talk about red meat, let's also discuss lamb for a moment because it is going to fit into the discussion later regarding available grazing acres. I have long lamented that it is sad our lamb consumption has been less than 1 lb. per person annually in the U.S. for quite some time. However, there is some good news as experts are projecting that consumption has increased ever so slightly (8%) in the past 12 months for now the 4th consecutive year. The problem with that scenario is that nearly 75% of the lamb consumed in the U.S. is imported.

In other positive news, pork is really moving and shaking. The data suggests that breeding inventory is slightly lower although litter size and larger carcass weights have pork production slightly above beef at about 28 billion pounds. We produce 26 billion pounds of beef per year and consume nearly 29 billion pounds, making up the difference with imported product.

To me, the real story here in the pork business is that we've made great strides in quality from the pale pork we produced during the past decade. Much more attention has been paid to eating quality rather than just focusing on growing a lean product. Dr. David Newman, CEO of the National Pork Board, had a tremendous discussion with me on Trent on the Loos this week and emphasized that pork is red, not white, meat. The new promotion slogan they have adopted is: "Taste what pork can do!"



While beef prices continue to capture headlines and cattle need to figure out where and how they fit in the food budget, add higher land costs into the mix and the real news story of 2025 may be "Where's the land?"

Pork is in a great position because an improved eating experience combined with higher beef prices will drive the consumer to shift protein budgets to pork. Pork prices are expected to increase by only about 1% at retail in 2026. There is discussion about bacon increasing by 18%, which tells you that pork loins and shoulders will continue to be a great buy in the grocery store.

Now for my take on the cattle business. We have all been told that the "drought" has caused a severe reduction in cattle breeding inventories and that has led to a shortage of beef supplies. I would like to call bovine fecal matter on that one. Yes, there has been widespread drought throughout the country for quite some time. I contend the drought has not been any more severe than droughts of the past. So why the lower cattle inventory?

It's simple: grass is leaving production of feed for grazing animals.

The University of IL FarmDoc Daily report shares the data from 2017 to 2022 courtesy of the USDA Ag Census. The report shows that 75 million acres of land, once in farming and grazing, have been removed from that use. Within that 75 million acres, 88% is pastureland. The total amount of pastureland has decreased by 13% through 2022 and continued to leave at a rate of 2 million plus acres each year since then.

While the West and East are really drivers in those massive numbers, even the Great Plains of America lost 32 million acres through 2022. We all know that has accelerated through 2025 with government incentives for alternative uses for grazing lands which includes paying CRP for pastureland.

While beef prices continue to capture headlines and cattle need to figure out where and how they fit in the food budget, add higher land costs into the mix and the

real news story of 2025 may be "Where's the land?" Sadly, I see most political campaigns gearing up to use China buying U.S. farmland for stump speeches BUT actually it is our own federal government that is causing the most problems. We need to look at the big picture and make some dynamic changes if we want to continue feeding the world as we head into 2026!

Editor's note: Trent Loos is a sixth generation United States farmer, host of the daily radio show, Loos Tales, and founder of Faces of Agriculture, a non-profit organization putting the human element back into the production of food.

Get more information at www.LoosTales.com, or email [Trent](mailto:Trent@trentloos@gmail.com) at [trentloos@gmail.com](mailto:Trent@trentloos@gmail.com).



TRIPLETS! — The calves were born on a Clark, Mo. farm the morning of December 26. A neighbor was driving by on her side by side and noticed momma cow giving birth. All heifers, all 3 doing well and NOT exceptionally small. Two of the three appear to be identical. The two identical appeared to be a bit weaker and it was decided to make them bottle calves. The neighbor that found them volunteered to bottle the two. She named all three. She is bottling Mud and Britches, Pasture Britches remains with her momma in the pasture. (Courtesy photos)

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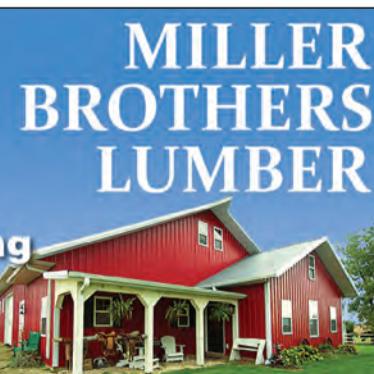
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BARNs OF PIKE COUNTY

Pike County's unusual octagonal barn has stood the test of time

By CAROLYN ALLEN
Special to The Advocate

The closest I could come to a heart shaped barn for Valentines Day is this beautiful, octagonal red barn. Why build a round or octagonal barn? I posed that question to Google and found many answers.

According to Google: round barns have greater storage capacity because they need fewer structural supports; the silo in the center makes feeding stock easier; they use fewer materials and therefore cost less to build; they are more wind resistant; they are more stable structurally; they have better ventilation with Dutch doors and a cupola. These are all good reasons, but the best reason I've found (or my favorite anyway) is that round barns allow horses to see each other which creates a "happy horse environment!" With all those reasons in mind, I'm a bit surprised there weren't more "round" barns built in Pike County.

There may have been more at one time, but to my knowledge this barn on Hwy WW near Clopton School is the only one left in Pike County, Mo. (There is at least one in Pike County, IL as well.) The property is listed on the National Register of Historic Places as the Griffith - McCune Farmstead. Pike Countians know it as Rockford Farm - named in honor of the old schoolhouse/turned home that also sits on the farm. According to information in the National Register, the 2-story brick home was built around 1870 by James A. Griffith with the barn going up later when J. Hurlie McCune owned the farm.

The National Register specifies that work on the octagonal barn with the center silo was begun in 1909 and completed in 1910. The 15 ft. diameter silo went up first with the 60 ft 8-sided barn being built around it. That allowed the silo to partially



OCTAGONAL BARN: This beautiful barn near Clopton in Pike County, Mo. has weathered storms for 116 years and has housed a wide array of animals through the years. (Photos by Carolyn Allen)

brace the sectional gambrel roof. There was a hayloft that encircled the barn when it was built, but it has since been removed. Round or polygonal barns gained popularity among progressive farmers in the late 1800's and early 1900's for the reasons mentioned above.

The property gets the name Griffith from early owner James A. Griffith who inherited the farm from his father Uriel Griffith. Uriel reportedly arrived in Pike County from Kentucky on Christmas Eve 1820 and staked out the homestead on Christmas Day. According to an article in the 1928 Clarksville Sentinel, he served as constable as well as schoolteacher in the area and bought 1600 acres of land at 12.5 cents/acre when the government sold it as swamp-land. He deeded farms to each of his sons, and this farm went to son James Amos Griffith who built the 2-story house.

The name McCune is included in the National Register's title because J. Hurlie McCune owned the farm when the barn was built. In 1901 John J. McCune bought the James A. Griffith farm which he then deeded to his son John Hurlie McCune in 1905. According to old newspapers Hurlie McCune owned this farm and several others but actually lived on Georgia Street in Louisiana.

Information from the National Register of Historic

Places suggests that Mr. McCune had seen a "round" barn somewhere and obtained plans for it. His tenant farmer on the Griffith farm at that time was Overton Broadhead (Broadie) McCardie. The National Register says that McCardie "erected the barn." Eolia historian Sara Grimes McBeth noted that Matt Holt of Annada did much of the actual construction. (He was a blacksmith in Annada at one time.) An interview with Broadie McCardie's daughter Bess Canter revealed that the barn was built with horse stalls in half the barn while the other half was left open and served as a shelter area for cattle.

There was an interesting note in the 8 Mar 1900 Louisiana Press Journal about Broadie McCardie. The newspaper reported that he and Maggie Haley had braved a snowstorm and journeyed to Bowling Green to get married. The Press Journal concluded, therefore, that they deserved a life of sunshine! Hopefully this beautiful new barn and silo added to that sunshine.



According to information in newspapers of the time, farm owner Hurlie McCune raised a little bit of everything: horses, mules, cattle, sheep and hogs.

Since the barn was built with stalls and an open area, it probably housed at least horses and mules as well as cattle at that time.

St. Louisan Ira Wight bought the farm in 1951. He raised

Percheron draft horses and might have kept a few there. Eventually, Ira's daughter Elizabeth (known as Bunny) and her husband Skyler "Swede" Herring settled on the farm and raised their family. Coming from a cattle background in Wyoming - even spending time as a rodeo cowboy - it seemed a natural fit for Skyler to raise cattle and manage the farm. Bunny had ridden both horses and elephants in the Ringling Brothers Barnum and Bailey Circus for a time, so they shared a love of horses and always had several on the farm. The farm is still in the family.

The barn is well maintained and has seen a wide array of animals over the years - from horses and cattle to peacocks and goats. It has weathered the storms of its 116 years very well which indicates that there might just be something to all those reasons for building a round barn!

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Florida watermelon grower finds sweet spot in NE Missouri

By LINDA WHELAN GEIST
University of Missouri Extension

MONROE CITY, Mo. — Florida watermelon grower Bob Stewart is finding northeastern Missouri ripe for growing what Monroe County-born author Mark Twain called the “food of angels.”

Stewart, owner of GID Farms of Immokalee, Florida, grew 6 million pounds of watermelon on 150 rented acres near Monroe City this past season. The location offers new challenges and opportunities to expand Stewart’s 20-year-old business.

Typically, over 95% of Missouri’s watermelons grow in the southeastern Bootheel, where sandy soil and a warm climate create ideal conditions, but northeastern Missouri offers fertile ground and opportunities, says University of Missouri Extension agronomist Nick Wesslak. He visited with Stewart about how nutrients, weed and pest control differ from state to state.

Stewart began growing watermelon in Florida in 1986 while working on the watermelon and cabbage farm of his friend’s father. He now raises 300 acres of watermelons that are contracted to Melon 1, the nation’s largest watermelon grower, packer and shipper. Melon 1’s customers in the United States and Central America include Walmart, Sam’s Club, Schnucks, Costco and Whole Foods, among others.

Florida is the nation’s largest producer of watermelons, followed by Texas, Georgia and California, according to the USDA’s National Agricultural Statistics Service. Missouri ranks seventh.

Florida melons are the first to be harvested domestically, giving them an edge in the market over melons imported from Guatemala and Mexico.

Stewart planted two seedless hybrid varieties in Missouri: El Capitan, known for its excellent yield and extended shipping ability; and Cracker Jack, an early maturing variety known for its dark red fruit and outstanding yield. In Florida, he plants seeded and unseeded varieties.

Stewart’s expansion complements his Florida operation. The Florida growing season begins Dec. 1, and harvest begins March 20, just as Missouri soils are starting to warm. Northeastern Missouri’s proximity to major distribution points reduces transportation costs and enables melons to arrive quicker and fresher at major retailers.

The expansion also spreads out risk of drought and disease among states. For example, watermelon crinkle leaf is an emerging cucurbit disease transmitted by the sweet potato whitefly in Florida, according to the University of Florida, but it is not present in Missouri.

MU Extension field horticulturist Justin Keay works with specialty crop growers. He says that it is not uncommon for specialty crop growers to lease

broad-scale acreage in other states.

Growers benefit from printed and online materials from MU Extension to guide specialty growers in assessing differences among states in soils, water availability, nutrients, herbicides and insecticides.

Research-based resources such as the Missouri specialty crop budgets plus in-person visits by MU Extension agronomists and horticulturists can help growers with decision-making.

Watermelon growing is labor-intensive, Stewart explains. The 70-day growing season in Missouri starts with planting nursery stock grown in a Georgia greenhouse.

A three-row machine with four laborers lays plastic for weed control. Six workers sit on the back of the three-row planter and drop plants into the ground. The field is irrigated with drip tape for good fruit set, size and yield. Water comes from a well with a mobile pump to a trench dug around the field.

Stewart also brings beehives to the fields because the pollinators transfer pollen essential for fruit development, even in seedless varieties. Insufficient pollination results in smaller, lower-quality melons.

The Missouri land was fertilized with 500 pounds of dry fertilizer per acre halfway through the growing season, followed by liquid fertilizer later in the season.

Harvest timing is critical for the best-looking and best-tasting fruit, says Stewart. The internal color and sugar content of the melon do not change after harvest, so it is important to pick at

BRAZEALE from page 10

ing his funeral you should plan accordingly. We might just start early in his honor!

Visitation was at the First Baptist Church in Paris on Friday, January 2, 2026.

A funeral service was held at the church on Saturday, January 3, with interment at Walnut Grove Cemetery in Paris. In lieu of flowers, the family suggests memorials to the Brazeale



RIPE FOR THE PICKIN': The Stewart family grows watermelons on 300 acres of Florida ground and supplies them to Melon 1, the largest watermelon grower, packer and shipper in the United States. Stewart had success in expanding his operation this past season to northeastern Missouri, which typically has not been used for commercial watermelon growing. At right, watermelon planting is labor-intensive. A three-row machine with four laborers lays plastic for weed control. Workers sit on the back of the three-row planter and drop plants into the ground. (Photos courtesy of Bob Stewart)

full maturity.

At full maturity, a crew cuts the melons from the vines and then handpicks them. A pitching crew then moves the watermelon “hand to hand” in assembly-line fashion into a modified “cutout” school bus. The “cutout” bus is painted white to distinguish it from its original purpose, and its top and windows are cut out to allow easy access.

Stewart says the heavy frames of the buses help to navigate the fields well and carry large amounts of watermelons from the field to a packing facility such as an abandoned manufacturing facility in Monroe City.

Missouri watermelon fields will be rotated back to soybean or corn next season, and Florida



fields are rotated to pastureland for cattle that provide natural nutrients for the next year’s watermelon crop.

Wesslak and Keay say they looks forward to working with Stewart in future years to develop options for Missouri farmers.

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Livestock News & Notes.....

Amidst testy trade talks, US demands UK ease meat barriers

As trade negotiators from the United States and United Kingdom hammer out the specifics from a 2025 deal, a central dispute has re-emerged — UK regulations on meat imports.

According to a Politico report, Trump administration officials have been pressuring the UK to abandon its European Union-aligned regulations on food imports that block hormone-treated U.S. beef and pork. This new hardline approach coincides with President Trump's threat of new tariffs on select European countries including the UK if they do not support his plan to acquire Greenland.

When the UK-U.S. trade deal was announced in May, U.S. beef exports to the island were a key part of the agreement, and USTR earlier this month granted a 10,000 metric tons annual tariff-rate quota for imports of UK beef; however, London officials were clear in 2025 that they would not change UK regulations around hormones. UK retailer Tesco defiantly stated it would not stock U.S. beef products.

In a statement to the media, the UK government praised the trade agreement's benefits to the "pharma, aerospace and auto sectors" while stressing "We have and always will be clear that we will uphold our high food, animal welfare and environmental standards in trade deals."

UK Trade Minister Chris Bryant told CNBC: "We will not compromise on food standards. ... There is no compromise for us to strike there."

Meanwhile, the U.S. beef industry has described the UK market as "very promising" for exports. "There is definitely an opportunity for high-quality, grain-fed products from the states going over to the UK," USMEF Chair-Elect Jay Theiler said in October.

Missing link: Smithfield snaps up iconic hot dog brand

Smithfield Foods Inc. said recently it will acquire Nathan's Famous in a \$450 million deal that adds star power to the buyer's branded packaged meats portfolio.

Smithfield said it is paying \$102 per share, nearly 10% above Tuesday's closing value, for the iconic hot dog maker.

Smithfield has held an exclusive license to make and sell Nathan's Famous products in North America, but the license is scheduled to expire in March 2032. With the purchase, Smithfield said it expects to achieve annual cost synergies of some \$9 million by the second anniversary of the deal closing. The deal is expected to close in the first half of this year.

Nathan's Famous began in 1916 as a hot dog stand in Coney Island, home to its annual July 4 hot-dog eating contest that has amplified the brand's notoriety among the American public.

"The Nathan's Famous acquisition is a meaningful step in the progression of Smithfield Foods, allowing us to own all of the top brands in our Packaged Meats portfolio," Smithfield CEO Shane Smith said.

MU Extension 2026 Missouri Custom Rates Survey

Farmers and agricultural service providers across Missouri are invited to participate in the University of Missouri Extension's statewide Custom Rates Survey.

This Tri-annual survey helps shed light on the costs associated with custom farming operations—such as tillage, planting, spraying, harvesting, land management work and machinery rental—offering valuable insights for both those who hire services and those who provide them.

"Whether you're a farmer trying to budget for next season or a service provider looking to stay competitive, the information from the custom rates survey helps bring transparency to the

marketplace," said Drew Kientzy, MU Extension research analyst and survey coordinator. "The more responses we receive, the more useful the results will be for farmers, custom applicators, earthmoving contractors, and many others."

The survey is designed to be quick, taking just 5–10 minutes to complete. It covers a wide range of custom services and aims to reflect real-world pricing across different regions and farm sizes. The survey results from 2023 can be found at muext.us/customrates.

Why participate?

- Farmers gain an understanding of what others are paying for custom work.
- Service providers can benchmark their rates against averages.
- Everyone benefits from more informed decision-making and fairer pricing.

How to respond:

Three convenient ways to respond to the survey are available.

A digital survey is available at muext.us/customrates, your county extension office can provide you with a paper copy of the survey, or you can request a printable survey by contacting Survey Coordinator, Drew Kientzy,

dkientzy@missouri.edu.

Don't miss your chance to help build a more transparent and competitive custom farm services market in Missouri. Respond to the 2026 Custom Rates for Farm Services Survey today!

Learn how to replace invasive species with natives at free workshop in Salem

SALEM, Mo. — University of Missouri Extension, Scenic Rivers Invasive Species Partnership and the Missouri Prairie Foundation will hold a workshop 1–3 p.m. Thursday, Feb. 26, in Salem to help homeowners replace invasive species with native plants and trees in yards and garden.

Sarah Higgins, MU Extension

field specialist in natural resources, said the event happens during Invasive Species Awareness Week, Feb. 23–27. "This free workshop will help attendees learn how to create healthier ecosystems by using native plants," said Higgins.

The workshop covers invasive plant management, establishment and management of native species, installing a native plant garden, and tree selection and care.

The event will be in the conference room of the MU Extension Center in Dent County. Register at <https://pears.io/events/mu/3857>.

For more information, contact Higgins at sarah.higgins@missouri.edu or 636-797-5391.

Some of the preceding items were taken from Meatingplace.com

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A bull breeding soundness exam pays

"A bull breeding soundness exam (BSE) is suggested prior to each breeding season to make sure a bull is physically and reproductively sound to breed females during the upcoming breeding season," says Patrick Davis MU Extension Livestock Field Specialist.

During the fall, MU Extension cooperated with veterinarians and a pharmaceutical company to provide education and collect data during bull BSE days. Davis will provide results from these events and discuss why the bull BSE pays.

During fall BSE days at two veterinary clinics in SW MO 109 bulls were tested from 25 different farms. Eleven of the 109 bulls from 6 farms failed or were deferred, which is a 10% fail/deferral rate. Of the 11 bulls, the veterinarian deferred 5 and suggested that they be retested. If they fail the retest, they need to be culled like failed bulls.

These findings are similar to data collected at previous BSE days held in SW MO. This data is also similar to North Dakota State data that summarized 5,800 bulls in 2014 and found that 9% of mature bulls and 17% of yearling bulls failed

Davis suggests that with cattle prices as they are, not doing a BSE is an expensive mistake and should be done before each breeding season to help ensure optimum herd pregnancy rates, income and profitability.

their BSE. Conkey et al. (2019) reported in Clinical Theriogenology from 2008 to 2018 with 1,375 bull records a 23.71% failure rate which is higher than what we have seen in SW MO.

"There were multiple reasons for bull deferral or failure," says Davis. The reasons for failure included no sample, lacerated penis, poor morphology, injured prepuce, and scrotum injury. Some of the younger bulls showed underdeveloped sperm morphology.

These bulls were deferred due to their potential to improve sperm morphology with an additional 30-60 days of maturity, when they may end up passing the BSE. One bull was deferred as he was healing from a lacerated penis and the veterinarian felt that giving him a breeding season off and retesting in the spring might yield a sound bull.

Alabama Cooperative

Extension System reports that sub-fertile bulls had a 16% reduction in pregnancy rate compared to fertile bulls in a 63-day breeding season. Furthermore, the sub-fertile bulls took longer to get cows pregnant, which means younger lighter calves at weaning.

Both fates result in less pounds of calf to market which influences operation income and profitability. These BSE days identified sub-fertile bulls that would not have been found without testing.

Davis suggests that with cattle prices as they are, not doing a BSE is an expensive mistake and should be done before each breeding season to help ensure optimum herd pregnancy rates, income and profitability.

For more information about bull BSE and management prior to and during the breeding season, contact your local MU Extension Livestock Field Specialist.

Pearls of Production returns Feb. 28 in Columbia

Conference offers a day of skill-building, networking and inspiration for women in agriculture

COLUMBIA, Mo. — The 2026 Pearls of Production Conference is set for Saturday, Feb. 28, at the University of Missouri Beef Research and Teaching Farm in Columbia.

This in-person gathering promises a full day of hands-on learning, idea exchange and inspiration, says Heather Conrow, MU Extension livestock and poultry specialist.

The conference begins with an 8:30 a.m. breakfast featuring Carey Portell, who has inspired thousands to change their perspectives by sharing her recovery journey after surviving an accident involving a drunk driver.

Session topics include:
Tips for a Successful Calving Season
Genetics for a Better Cow
Small Ruminant Neonatal Care
Lunch and Learn: Show Me the Money
Save the Cuss Words: You Got This! 2.0
Technology Showcase: Virtual Fencing and Drones
Parents attending the confer-

ence can enroll children ages 5-12 in "Future Pearls of Production," held in partnership with Mizzou Block and Bridle. For \$5, children can enjoy their own mini agriculture adventure while their parents attend sessions. The full cost for adult participants is \$20. Find details and registration at <https://murext.us/POPFeb2026>.

"We've done it again with an excellent lineup of speakers and topics on a variety of livestock species," Conrow said. "During Pearls of Production, we don't just talk shop. We build skills, swap stories and celebrate those who keep agriculture thriving. It's hands-on, high-energy and

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full of pearls of wisdom!" MU Extension's Pearls of Production aims to bring in unique and new talent to the industry at large, she said. "Empowering participants isn't just about education. It's about cultivating confidence, leadership and a legacy of resilience."

For questions, contact Heather Conrow at hconrow@missouri.edu or 660-248-2272.

Big government is the problem

By REP. SAM GRAVES
Congressman, 6th District of Missouri

America is at its best when we get big government out of the way and give people the freedom to innovate and succeed. It's when the government invades people's lives, starts dictating everything we do, and bureaucrats decide they know better than us that we see America at its worst. That's why Ronald Reagan used to say, "The nine most terrifying words in the English language are: I'm from the government, and I'm here to help."

Liberals may think that they have good intentions, but they get it wrong so often. That's exactly what we've seen with the absolutely massive fraud uncovered in Minnesota.

Most Americans would agree that ensuring our neighbors have a roof over their head, food on the table, and the healthcare they need isn't a bad thing. The problem is that when you think government is the only solution and create massive programs with zero oversight, you fling the doors open for waste, fraud, and abuse. Now, we're all paying the price.

\$9 billion. That's how much they think Somali scammers and others stole from welfare programs in Minnesota. To put that in perspective, that's about how much we spend on primary and secondary education in Missouri, or double what we spend on fixing roads and bridges every year. It's a massive amount of money, and it's just the tip of the iceberg.

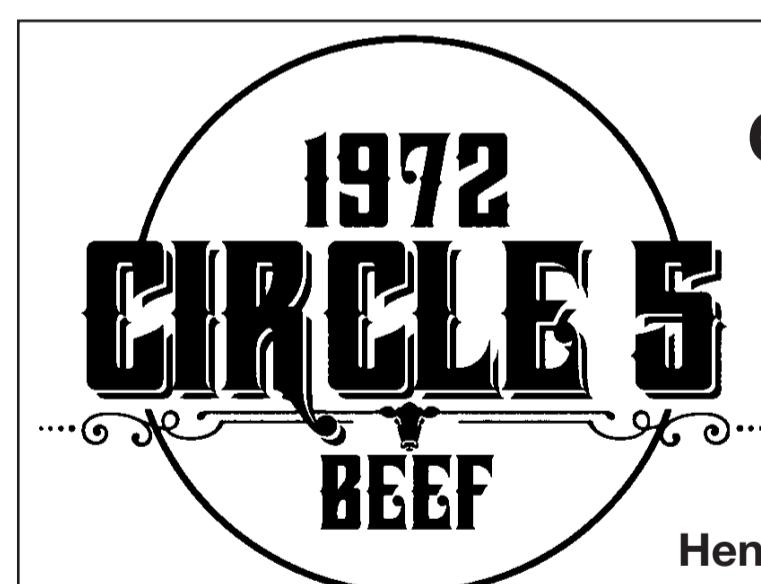
It's not just that these programs are rife with waste, fraud, and abuse; half the problem is that they don't work well even when they work as intended. Far too many get trapped in these programs, getting handouts and never getting a hand up to succeed on their own.

We have to remember that government isn't always the solution. We have a whole toolbox at our disposal, not just a hammer—and every problem isn't a nail.

We shouldn't be wasting billions we don't have, trying to solve every challenge Americans face. We should focus on doing the things the government should do—and do well—and cutting the rest. That's why I was proud to support appropriations bills this week to cut more than \$2 billion in wasteful spending, while investing in things that matter, like stopping the scourge of fentanyl, which is destroying our communities and killing our children. These bills don't solve all our challenges, but they're a good step in the right direction.

We've got to remember that the government didn't make America great—hardworking Americans did. And, if we want to make America great again, we have to get big government out of the way and let Americans do what we do best—innovate and succeed.

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Politics and Nutrition Curmudgeons: It ain't easy being red (meat)

By STEVE DITTMER
Executive Vice President
Agribusiness Freedom Foundation

The media we've seen so far -- the day after the big Dietary Guidelines announcement -- has unfolded pretty much as we predicted yesterday. Luckily for us, the message of more animal protein being good for people got through. The Wall Street Journal, for example, took until paragraph 21 until they mentioned the 1.2-1.6 grams/kilogram body weight equation for protein daily intake, roughly double the previous figure. And no, they didn't begin to delve into conversions and practical explanations of what that meant for consumers.

At least one cardiologist from Tufts University said we already eat too much protein and rued the proliferation of protein energy bars, protein water, high protein cereal and other products protein-fortified as the attitudes about protein have changed.

But as we wrote yesterday, people cannot increase their protein consumption by eating animal protein without violating the 10 percent saturated fat cap. Is that poor reasoning by the "experts" or is it on purpose, by design, knowing that the problem can only be resolved by beans and peas?

But what about the behind-the-scenes maneuvering about capping saturated fat consumption to 10 percent of the diet? What are possible factors contributing to keeping the cap in place when there is no scientific evidence to support such a cap?

Nina Teicholz, the science writer and author of the "Big Fat Surprise," posits several possible theories, or perhaps all of them form multiple hurdles in overcoming long-time scientific bias. She notes that while the easy explanation is that the science showing that there is no causal connection between saturated fats and heart disease is not strong enough to dislodge the long-held theory that there is one. The established theory did not hold up years ago, especially for the 2020 Guidelines and more evidence has surfaced since then. But the lions of "The Diet," as Teicholz refers to it, do not recognize any evidence that doesn't support their theory. Reminds one of our "mainstream" media and facts that uphold conservative politics. Those facts are ignored.

"Scientific opinion has shifted steadily in favor of saturated fats over the past 15 years -- but that view has not managed to pierce through the guarded establishment consensus laid down 80 years ago," Teicholz said.

Inside sources told Teicholz that the agencies wanted more protein and less sugar and grains to be the dominant takeaway from the news. They didn't want a reversal on saturated fat to be headlines.

Those political considerations overrode the scientific consider-



ations that encouraging more nutrient dense animal proteins with better amino acid content, more vitamins and minerals would be better for the public's health.

The powers that be also were concerned that the report shouldn't seem too activist. Coming from a team with RFK Jr. on it, that borders on ridiculous but that was a consideration. Even more disappointing was the fear of being the only country reversing advice on saturated fat when other countries and the WHO health organization aren't there.

And while Kennedy's advisors aren't shy about attacking big food corporations, they seem shy about confronting big names at Harvard, or Tufts or NYU and especially the American Heart Assn.

Then there's RFK Jr.'s base. They have a well-defined agenda when it comes to vaccines and food "toxins" like food dyes but not a lot of concentrated purpose after that, Teicholz pointed out.

She also noted that the doctors and experts interested in obesity, diabetes and other conditions that have an interest in saturated fats as answers to chronic diseases have not been included in MAHAs leadership.

Teicholz also noted that the industry groups supporting saturated fats were dairy and cattle groups. But other issues in a busy year like screwworm, tariffs and trade policy have kept them busy, she thought.

There are other factors but the fact remains that lots of clinical trials -- not theory -- have not yielded data that there is a connection between saturated fats and heart disease and mortality. One of the most elevated so-called experts holding to the less animal products more fruits and vegetables crowd, a former vice-chairman of the Dietary Guidelines Advisory Committee, Alice Lichtenstein of Tufts University, in an e-mail unearthed via FOIA request, admitted there was "no data" to support the 10 percent cap on saturated fats, Teicholz noted.

The large clinical trials on saturated fats involving 60,000 to 80,000 global patients could never demonstrate that reducing saturated fat lowered one's risk of death from heart disease or other diseases, she said. Nearly two dozen review papers of clinical trials by worldwide scientific teams came to the same conclusion.

Teicholz noted that even a

recent outside review commissioned by HHS concluded that saturated fats do not affect mortality. Thus making the 10 percent cap irrelevant and unsupported by science. But it continues.

Teicholz's research is so good, her article this summer unearthed a name we hadn't thought of in years. George Mann, Vanderbilt University, did research analysis in the '60s and '70s and concluded that saturated fats and heart disease were not connected. We heard his research being quoted by the Beef Industry Council of the Meat Board in the '70s, for example.

But his opposition to the cholesterol, animal food theories on coronary heart disease cost him his grants, access to medical journals and reputational damage.

His finding from examining the food consumption records from a thousand participants in the famous Framingham study showed no correlation between serum cholesterol levels and animal fat consumption. Yet his conclusions were buried in an NHS basement for a decade and even when their existence became known in 1968, Teicholz said one had to dig through 28 volumes to unearth his conclusions.

That is just one example of how exonerating facts about animal products have been buried, obfuscated, ignored and kept from public discourse since the time of President Dwight D. Eisenhower's heart attack in 1955. Ancel Keys started his proselytizing against animal fats in 1952.

Despite years of contradictory research, we're still fighting. We've made progress but as Teicholz points out, moving mountains of nutrition bureaucracy is not easy.

Us senior people remember how long it took to quash the theory that short, blocky cattle were the proper aim of the industry. We got beat out for Grand Champion steer in 1968 by a 775-lb. Angus steer -- live weight, mind you -- judged by a leading animal science professor from Ohio State. How many of you remember the aroma in show barns of corn and oats being cooked like breakfast cereal for show cattle rations? Cookers were important equipment in those days.

Kennedy and Ag Secretary Brooke Rollins had the chance, and the expressed aim, of finally erasing those errors from government human nutrition policy. They've helped but they missed a great opportunity.

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Digging Deeper....

By JUSTIN ANGELL

I guess we can open this column with a silver update. In November I expressed my belief that gold and silver would be rising exponentially higher soon. In December 2025, I explained in depth why silver prices were about to explode higher. We've now gotten to a point where I believe physical silver price can still run much higher, but now I am not comfortable trusting the COMEX financial system.

With silver prices now over \$90 an ounce, many pundits and YouTubers are predicting much higher silver prices in the future, pushed mostly by industrial demand for a scarce metal.

I don't disagree with the much higher prices for real silver that you can hold in your hand. What I have a problem with is the COMEX Silver Rule number 7. Basically, that's the rule that was implemented to protect the short positioned banks in 1980 as the Hunt Brothers successfully cornered the silver market. I've talked about this at length, so I won't review history, but historically if the big bullion banks get on the wrong side of a big trade as they are now, the COMEX changes the rules.

This has happened most recently with nickel in 2022 — that rule change simply canceled all the long contracts. In 2016, Palladium was the victim of another rule change, but after being forced back lower, the price of palladium eventually rose 6X in four years.

Even as far back as 1997, Warren Buffett was able to buy contracts equaling 25% of the above ground supply of silver. I believe being faced with the potential of having his long contracts canceled, he magnanimously agreed to give the short positions extra time to fill delivery notices.

Rather than taking the chance of all my positive positions being canceled, I'm settling and ringing the register even though I think there is a tremendous amount of room on the upside. If you're keeping track, I have exited all my paper long contracts and call positions. This is

in no way investment advice. I'm just talking about what I do, etc. etc. etc..

Again, the reason I spend time on metals, oil, etc., is because all derivative markets are at some point connected. I still believe there may be risk rising in all derivative markets because of this severe imbalance in the silver and gold derivatives markets that may eventually affect cattle futures.

I also believe that physical silver and gold, land, bitcoin, etc. will continue to be a good long-term investments with prices potentially traveling much higher as the purchasing value of our fiat currencies travels lower.

I was asked last week where the risk on opportunity was if not in the derivative markets, and so I pointed out that silver and gold miners are still being valued on \$40-\$50 silver and \$3200 gold. Gold and silver mining companies are ramping up production and printing money as fast as they can. I think 2026 will prove these publicly traded companies, to be some of the most truly profitable companies on Wall Street (importantly, I am assuming their production is not hedged too low for too long... very important)

This is just a fascinating moment in time that I've been waiting for, for about 15 years. It will be interesting to see how events really play out.

In other news, Iran is having their Berlin moment. I can remember watching the TV news coverage when the residents of East and West Berlin tore down the wall that had divided them my entire lifetime (1961-1989).

The implosion of the Soviet Union and the freedom gained by the Iron Curtain countries is something until then I never thought that would ever be possible.

As I watch the events in Iran unfold, I have the same incredulous, hopeful feeling. Historically, Iran (known as Persia for most of its history) has been culturally, more European than Asian or African. Persians are historically bitter enemies of the Arabs. There will undoubt-

edly be months of turmoil, but right now Iran has a chance to shed the radical Muslim yolk and become a prosperous secular democracy once again. Time will tell.

Another bit of good news is that the Argentinians have repaid the \$2 billion with interest the United States arranged for them to borrow months ago. Basically United States government set up a \$20 billion line of credit to help Argentina stabilize Argentine peso.

Utilizing only \$2 billion of this \$20 billion line of credit, Javier Milei, the Argentine president, has astounded the world in his ability to turn that country away from its socialist history into a reforming capitalist country. Much of his success is a direct result of dismantling the overreaching national government.

Malay has used his popular support to eliminate whole departments from their federal government. Again, still a lot of turmoil down there, but I'm thinking I might like to go and visit Argentina. Seems like with another year of solid progress, Argentina may become a wonderful place for tourism and global investments.

Additionally on the interna-

tional front, what can you say about Venezuela? Only Trump would have the moxie to order an international snatch and grab.

The most interesting part about the whole event to me is the firsthand account of a Venezuelan security survivor. The description of 20 American soldiers coming off undetected helicopters wearing some type of special uniforms with weapons that allowed them to shoot an estimated 200 rounds per minute with sniper accuracy. The survivor said there was also some type of debilitating sonic weapon that was so intense it made their heads feel like they're going to explode resulting in bleeding from the nose, eyes and ears.

Within minutes, the 20 American special forces troops had dispatched 200 members of Maduro's personal guard including 32 Cuban bodyguards and exited unscathed with Maduro and his wife. The Americans suffered no loss of equipment no loss of life... In and out. In a word audacious.

This firsthand description by a surviving member of Maduro's bodyguard describing total battle scene domination by US special forces will go further

in deterring miscreant misbehavior internationally than any carrier group.

And finally in international news, we find Greenland.

Bottom line... there will eventually be a deal rather than an invasion. The United States in the end may not own Greenland, but Trump will end up with what he thinks this country needs.

"Minnesota-stan" will continue to be a problem for ICE. I think eventually there will be some arrests of the radical paid protesters and their financiers.

One of those looking at jail time might be the former CNN journalist (struggling for relevance) Don Lemon. This will be as a result of the invasion of a church service and the intimidation by radical members against the Christian parishioners.

Ironically, the legal precedence are federal laws passed to curb activities, intimidations and violations of civil rights during the KKK era.

Laughable that Don Lemon would go to jail for activities, reminiscent of the KKK activities. Again, we'll see how this works out.

That's all I've got for this month. Beautiful sunny winter day awaits me. Carpe Diem

Angell Livestock

Dealers of all classes of cattle • Centralia, Missouri

Cattle procurement is harder than ever, but we are quietly doing it every week. In 2025 we have procured and then sold or placed 1226 cows, pairs, and heifers to our clients. We had a very good 2025. We are looking forward to an even better 2026.

Let's talk about what you're looking for and what we can do for you.

Available this week of print date:

- 1 Black three year old bull. (sold)
- 1 Red three year old bull. (sold)
- 47 black white face bred heifers bred black bulls to start Feb 15 for 52 days.
- 22 black second period 3-5 year old cows by black bulls
- 1 load Red Angus bred heifers most AI bred to Bieber Blue Chip to calve 3/7/26 (sold)
- 6 mixed young char, red and blk cows in early third period by black bulls. (sold)
- 6 mixed young red, r wf, and b wf cows in late second period by black bulls (sold)



Let's talk about what you're looking for and what we can do for you.

Justin Angell: 573-819-8000 Jon Angell: 573-682-4656



Eastern Missouri Commission Company, Bowling Green
Market Report for Friday, January 16, 2026
Receipts: 2947 Week ago: 2,380 Year ago: 775

Friday's auction was a Special Bred Cow sale with a consignment of good quality young bred cows in the 3rd stage 3-5 yrs of age selling from 3950.00-4250.00 and a consignment of bred heifers in the 3rd stage selling at 4050.00. The balance were mostly bred cows 5 yrs to short solid mouth mostly in the 3rd stage. Feeder cattle were lightly tested selling in small packages and groups. Slaughter steers and heifers along with a large consignment of slaughter cows all sold fully steady.

Feeder Steers: Medium and Large 1 – Pkg 585 lbs 437.50. Medium and Large 1-2 – Few 400-450 lbs 474.00-506.00; 500-550 lbs 422.50-450.00, 580-585 lbs 376.00-404.00; 600-650 lbs few 376.00-418.00, 650-700 lbs 360.00-393.00, fleshy 330.00-349.00; 750-800 lbs 335.00-345.00; pkg 902 lbs 308.00.

Feeder Heifers: Medium and Large 1- Pkg 488 lbs 470.00. Medium and Large 1-2 – Pkg 312 lbs 467.50; 450-500 lbs few 378.00-400.00; 500-550 lbs few 385.00-396.00, 550-600 lbs 355.50-385.00; 650-700 lbs 320.00-339.00; pkg 705 lbs 340.00; pkg 872 lbs 280.00.

Feeder Bulls: Medium and Large 1 – Pkg 436 lbs 480.00. Medium and Large 1-2 – Pkg 418 lbs 465.00, pkg 469 lbs 424.00; 550-600 lbs 370.00-400.00; 600-625 lbs 377.00-378.00, 650-700 lbs 330.00-340.00.

Replacement Cows: Bred Heifers - Medium and Large 1 – 1110-1230 lbs 3rd stage 4050.00.

Bred Cows - Medium and Large 1 – 3-5 yrs 1265-1395 lbs 3rd stage 3950.00-4250.00, lot 6-7 yrs 1460 lbs 3rd stage 3500.00.

Medium and Large 1-2 – 2-3 yrs 980-1260 lbs 3rd stage 3350.00-3700.00, 5 yrs to short solid mouth 3rd stage 3200.00-3600.00, lot aged cows 1325 lbs 3rd stage 2850.00.

Pairs: Medium and Large 1-2 – Few 6 yrs to short solid mouth 1200-1350 lbs w/200-300 lb calves 3975.00-4500.00.

Slaughter Cows: Premium White (65-70% lean) Average

dressing, 155.00-161.00. Breakers (70-80% lean) Average dressing, 151.50-160.00; high dressing, 162.00-169.50; and low dressing, 140.00-147.00.

Boners (80-85% lean) Average dressing, 150.00-161.00; high dressing, 162.00-170.00; and low dressing, 136.00-147.00. Lean (85-90% lean) Average dressing, 138.00-148.00; high dressing, 153.00-160.00; and low dressing, 122.00-135.00. Shelly 105.00-117.00.

Slaughter Bulls: Yield Grade 1-2 – 1300-2400 lbs, 185.00-198.00; 200.00-209.50; 163.00-183.00.

Slaughter Steers and Heifers: (45 hd) Choice 2-3 – 1235-1560 lbs 224.00-228.00.

Select and Choice 1-3 – 1250-1350 lbs 222.00-223.50

Source: MO Dept of Ag-USDA Market News Service, Bowling Green, MO, Greg Garrison, Market Reporter 573-751-5618. 24 hour recorded report 1-573-522-9244 www.ams.usda.gov/mnreports/JC_LS156.txt



Market Reports

Sponsored by Prairie Queen Transportation, LLC

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USDA FRAUD

from page 11

the \$20 million by the “cleanest way to do the transaction, kill any trace, and cover everyone,” via a Dubai diamond purchase. DOJ investigators later seized a memo written by Patel, detailing his intentions:

“I have arranged a diamond merchant that I trust in Dubai (based out of India-Parsas Patel). He is a major player and I’ve bought from him before. He has a 103.78 carat diamond. Shape is a modified shield, it is VS1 purity, and Color is Fancy Dark with brown greenish and yellow. He will provide a GI and Kimberly Certificate. This is one of the rarest diamonds in the world that is very sought after. He is also going to sell us 2-3 other diamonds similar to this one (smaller but similar). The 3-4 diamonds he sells us value will look on paper like \$30MM and he will invoice for it \$30MM.”

To cover his absence from his scheduled sentencing in Chicago for the initial \$179 million scam, Patel planned to tell DOJ officials he was “going to rehab or a meditation camp for a week, this way they do not suspect anything by my phone being shut off,” while missing his court date.

“I may even use a different name to leave,” he noted. “The only people I have to tell is the pilot so he can document his flight log.”

On a Saturday morning, Jan. 6, 2018, three days prior to sentencing, Patel rolled to Kissimmee Gateway Airport, driven by Timirchand in a Cadillac Escalade. At 7 a.m., as luggage was transferred to a chartered jet, four FBI agents bagged Patel. In his possession, according to DOJ, “Patel had an Indian passport in his name (forged and backdated to 2010), United States currency (\$20,000), documents relating to his attempt to obtain asylum in Ecuador, financial documents indicating access to accounts holding millions of dollars, and detailed checklists for tasks relating to obtaining asylum in Ecuador and setting up a new life there for himself and his family.”

Thrown in Florida lockup, Patel already was piling more blocks on the Jenga tower.

Another Drink at the Well

Awaiting transfer to Chicago, Patel pulled levers from behind bars and went all-in on the Ron Elias charade. His crony, Timirchand (later arrested and sentenced to two years in

Judge Charles Kocoras, when sentencing Patel back in 2018 for the first \$179-million con job, presciently described the con artist extraordinaire: “There’s a certain diabolical genius to what he did here.”

prison), was Patel’s instrument beyond prison walls. Per a DOJ attorney’s testimony in June 2018: Patel instructed Timirchand how to log-in to the account and instructed him which emails to send to various peoples in order to further the fraudulent misrepresentations and to actually cause the funds to be disbursed. There were phone calls to Mr. Timirchand from the jail instructing him how to send emails to someone else, to representatives of the USDA.

On March 6, 2018, Patel, then 34, was sentenced to 25 years for the original \$179 million fraud.

Surreally, Patel, federal prisoner #61337-018, was unbowed. It was time for another drink at the USDA well.

House of Cards

The following year, in 2019, while imprisoned for the first fraud (\$179 million), and under indictment for the second fraud (\$20 million) stemming from the Farmer Mac debacle, Patel engineered a third fraud, this time keeping it in the family. His accomplice? Wife, Trisha Patel.

Via emails, phone calls, and prison visits between 2019 and 2023, the pair spun a wooly web. Rather than Patel taking a fake identity such as Ron Elias or Geoff Kane, Trisha assumed two bogus identities, “Maya Greer” and “Robert Engelmeyer,” later exposed by phony email addresses and burner apps.

The Patels conjured a fictitious lending company, Community 1st Mortgage, fronted by lead officer Maya Green (Trisha).

According to Trisha’s subsequent plea deal: “This new loan scheme had another new concept beyond the creation of a fake lender. It included the use of legitimate business to facilitate the fraud. Nikesh Patel looked for a business that was for sale and discovered a listing for Precision Powered Products, Inc. (PPP), a commercial pump manufacturer in Houston, Texas. The company’s owner wanted to retire after nearly 40 years of running the business. Nikesh Patel Inquired with a broker about the listing in late 2020 and learned specific information

about the business.”

Incredibly, the Patels used Texas-based PPP to dupe USDA.

Trisha hid her true identity behind the mask of Robert Engelmeyer, a fictitious PPP executive, who needed an \$8,540,000 loan from Community 1st to expand PPP business—not in rural Nebraska or rural New Mexico—but rather, in rural Puerto Rico. Trisha, acting as Robert Engelmeyer, persuaded USDA that PPP needed a loan to boost operations in Cabo Rojo.

And the business address leased by PPP in Cabo Rojo? A vacant building under renovation, with no relation to commercial pump manufacturing. A shell. No one at USDA bothered to check. Instead, USDA backed the \$8,540,000 loan at 80%.

After securing USDA’s guarantee, Trisha, masquerading as Maya Greer of Community 1st, sold the loan for \$7,446,880 on Nov. 21, 2021, to Hanover Securities, a broker-dealer in Memphis, Tenn. (According to Trisha’s later plea, Hanover “broke the loan into smaller portions and resold them to smaller banks. To avoid detection, Trisha Patel would pay the loan payments each month for each of these loans using fraud proceeds.”)

The day of sale, Hanover wired \$7-plus million to Community 1st and Maya Greer. Trisha emailed her husband at Seminole County Jail in Florida, writing: “It’s here!!!! Finally.”

Patel answered: “Amazing news! I will call after count, after 5 pm. Make sure its showing credited and available.”

Trisha then doled \$1.2 million of the haul to “various attorneys, lobbyists, and consultants on behalf of Nikesh Patel,” greasing the political skids for Patel’s release. (Keeping up appearances, she also spent \$81,000 on a new BMW.) Trisha made the rounds of high society on both sides of the political aisle, even popping up at a White House party in October 2022.

However, the Patel’s house of cards finally crashed in 2023, as the FBI and USDA Office of Inspector General discovered the paper trail. Trisha was arrested;

Patel, already under lock and key, was given a cell cleanout. As described by FBI Special Agent Alex Duda, the results were telltale: “On Sept. 20, 2023, officials at the Seminole County Jail conducted a cell search of Nikesh Patel’s cell. The officials observed a large

quantity of documents, estimated to consist of approximately 3,000 pages, in six neat stacks under Patel’s mattress. The officials characterized the amount of documents located in Patel’s cell as ‘substantial’ and ‘extraordinary.’”

Wash, rinse, repeat. Once again, it was time for Patel’s sentencing, but this time Trisha also faced the music.

Sticky Fingers, Twisted Threads

No one left to lie to. On Sept. 18, 2024, Trisha, 41, was sentenced to 51 months in federal prison, and is currently incarcerated at FCI Marianna, Florida. A month later, Oct. 8, 2024, Patel was sentenced to 27 years on top of his previous 25 years—a draconian total of 52 years in the pen, a disproportionate sentence in the eyes of many legal observers. He is doing time at FCI Bennettsville, South Carolina.

Strikingly, on the heels of his near-escape to Ecuador during his second con (Farmer Mac), and after his third con (USDA-PPP) was in motion, Patel, on July 6, 2020, while incarcerated, authored a third-person post on Medium, claiming victimhood due to “racial tactics” by DOJ: “The pattern of prosecutorial misconduct against people of color extended to ignoring evidence and making willfully false claims in the case against Patel,” he wrote. “It demonstrates a pattern of misconduct that Patel is

hoping to further expose in his clemency plea.”

At the post’s end, he signed off: “Nikesh Patel, former Investment Banker, resident of Florida and the subject of overzealous prosecution. Hoping to get justice and have my narrative told.”

Patel’s claims of injustice gained the attention of Jesse Jackson in 2022. Jackson urged the U.S. attorney’s office to release Patel on home confinement. A mere 10 months after Jackson’s advocacy, Patel’s fraud No. 3 exploded, along with its surreal narrative tied to 3,000 pages stuffed under a mattress and Puerto Rican pump fakes, all bookended by another 27 years on Patel’s sentence. As of 2026, Patel describes himself as a “political prisoner” and seeks a presidential pardon.

From the get-go, the threads of Patel’s crime saga twisted deep. All told, he siphoned approximately \$210 million. Where did the money go? The feds recovered over \$100 million. The rest? In a hole; offshore; Dubai; family?

Judge Charles Kocoras, when sentencing Patel back in 2018 for the first \$179-million con job, presciently described the con artist extraordinaire: “There’s a certain diabolical genius to what he did here.”

Kocoras added a sobering kicker, particularly considering Patel’s second and third frauds were yet to spawn. Kocoras described the tangled, initial scheme as one that “most mere mortals wouldn’t even contemplate.”

Despite knowing the fuse was already burning on more theft, Patel solemnly assured the court: “It is going to be my actions that will show remorse.”

Actions, indeed.

THE Cattleman's Advocate

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Monthly Sheep & Goat Market Reports

Sponsored by The Bank of Missouri

Montgomery County Livestock Auction, Montgomery City Market Report for Sheep & Goat Auction

Thursday, January 8, 2026

Receipts: 710 Last month: 837 Year ago: 700

Montgomery County Livestock held their Sheep and Goat sale Thursday evening January 08, with a nice offering of lambs weighing mostly 55-70 lbs and selling steady to 10.00 higher than last month’s auction. Demand was good on the slaughter lambs as they sold on an active market. Feeder Lambs and slaughter ewes both traded steady on a light offering. Kid goats and all classes of goats were scarce. Montgomery County holds their Sheep and Goat sale the 2nd

Thursday of each month. All prices are per CWT unless otherwise noted.

SHEEP (prices per hundredweight)

Slaughter Lambs: Choice-few Prime 1-3 – Mostly hair lambs 50-70 lbs 375.00-400.00, pkg Fancy 48 lbs 412.50. 80-85 lbs 305.00-315.00.
Choice 1-2 – 50-70 lbs 350.00-370.00.

Feeder Lambs: Small and Medium 1-2 – Pkg 32 lbs 435.00, 40-48 lbs 340.00-390.00.

Slaughter Ewes: Utility and Good 1-2 – Few 88-148 lbs

125.00-130.00. Utility 1-2 77 lbs 100.00.

Replacement Ewes: Young 2-5 yrs 80-148 lbs exposed 140.00-210.00 per hd.

GOATS: (prices per hundred weight)

Kid Goats: Selection 1 – Scarce.
Feeder Kids: Selection 1-2 – Scarce
Nannies: Selection 1-2 – Scarce.
Nannies/Does: Selection 1-2 – Scarce

Source: MO Dept of Ag-USDA Market News Service, Montgomery City, MO, Greg Garrison, Market Reporter

Laugh Tracks in the Dust.....

Bargain drinks

By MILO YIELD
Special to The Advocate

Two past-middle-age Kansas rancher brothers were traveling to the high country in Colorado to bring home a purebred bull they'd bought via an internet auction.

They were traveling through one small Rocky Mountains town after another, and they were getting road weary, when they spotted a sign on The Old-Timers Bar and Grill advertising "All Drinks, Quarter Each."

They looked at each other and agreed that they should check into a motel close by and then go check out the bar's advertising and wet their whistle.

So, after securing their rooms for the night, through the front door of the bar they go and plop down on two bar stools.

The friendly old bartender booms out in a voice that carries across the room, "Welcome, fellas, let me pour one for you! What'll it be, gentlemen?"

There was a fully-stocked bar in front of them, so each of the ranchers orders a high-quality bourbon and water. Pronto, the bartender serves up their drinks and as they take their first sip, he says, "That'll be 25-cents each, gents."

The ranchers stare dumbfounded at the bartender for a moment, then at each other. They can't believe their good luck. They pay the 50-cents, finish their drinks, and order another identical round.

Again, two excellent bourbon and branch are produced, with the bartender again saying, "That's 50-cents, please."

The ranchers pay the 50-cents, but then their curiosity gets the better of them. They've drank four fine bourbon drinks and spent a grand total of one dollar. Finally one of them says to the barkeep, "How can you afford to serve drinks as good as these for a quarter apiece?"

"I'm a retired military man," the bartender says, "and I always wanted to own a bar in retirement. Last year I hit the lottery jackpot big time for \$200 million and decided to open this place. Every drink costs a quarter -- wine, liquor, beer -- it's all the same!"

"Wow! That's some story!" one of the ranchers says. "And, your generosity is amazing."

As they continue to savor their drinks at the bar, they can't help noticing four other down-in-the-mouth old country-looking folks at the end of the bar who don't have any drinks in front of them and haven't ordered anything the whole time they've been there.

Nodding at the four at the end of the bar, one of the ranchers asks the bartender, "What's with those guys? Why aren't they drinking?"

The bartender chuckles and answers, "Oh, those guys. They're Scottish sheep ranchers who recently bought their flocks down from the high pastures. They're waiting for Happy Hour when drinks are half-price."

I see the USDA has released its new food pyramid. As expected, it's caused a ruckus in the media because it recommends eating more red meat protein, more full-fat cheeses, and more butter. That sounds like the diet I've been eating all my life, so I'm in full agreement with the new food pyramid.

Nevah and I had to make a day trip to Topeka last week. On our return, we drove highway 24 back to Riley. It was raining all the way, and we were amazed at the stupendous flocks of snow geese blanketing hundreds of acres of stubble fields and wheat fields. I'm talking at least hundreds of thousands of geese. First, I thought how much damage those flocks could cause to wheat fields. But, then I thought of the thousands of pounds of goose manure fertilizer they were

delivering for free to those stubble fields. It was either a loss or a gain depending on whose fields they fed on and whose they rested on.

Speaking of birds, our daughter and son-in-law in Riley recent got a new back yard bird feeder. It's got new-age features. One, it's got a camera that takes a feather-perfect picture of each bird that eats from it. They can see the birds on their smart phones. Two, for a few bucks a month, the camera will also perfectly identify every visiting bird. Pretty neat!

Sticking with the wildlife subject, last week one of the old geezers in our group had a full-grown cougar cross his farm not far from his home. That is both neat and a bit scary at the same time. More and more cougars are

appearing in Kansas these days.

I want to make a correction to an error I inadvertently wrote in my column two weeks ago. I reported that ocean-going tankers and cargo ships burned 70 to 400 tons of high polluting tar-like fuel per hour.

That was incorrect. They actually burn that amount of the fuel in a DAY. Sorry about that error. I had a senior moment. Still a lot of pollution.

We've had extreme yo-yo weather recently in Riley. The temps go up into the 60s and drop down below freezing. It snowed an inch one night and melted the next day. Then it rained and the wind blew a gale. That's Kansas winter weather for you.

Words of wisdom for the week: "Make some decisions not because they'll make the most dollars, but because they make the most sense." Have a good 'un.

**The Cattleman's Advocate
is now available online! You
can see each month's new issue
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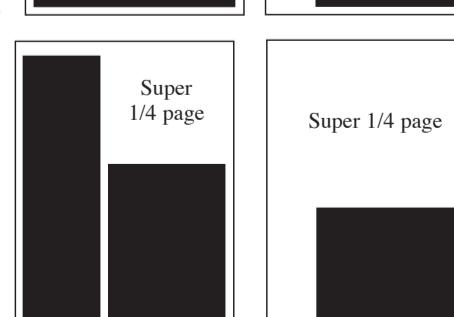
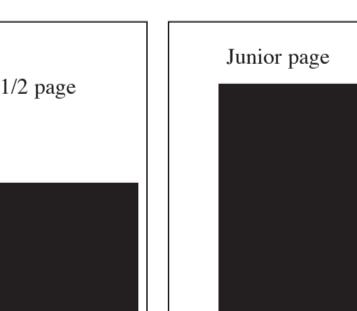
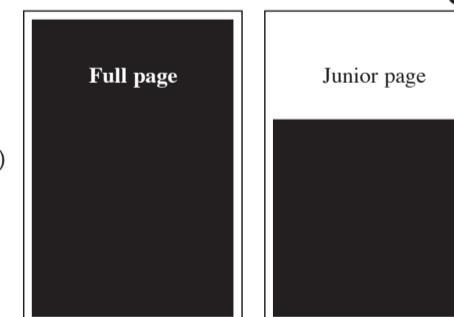
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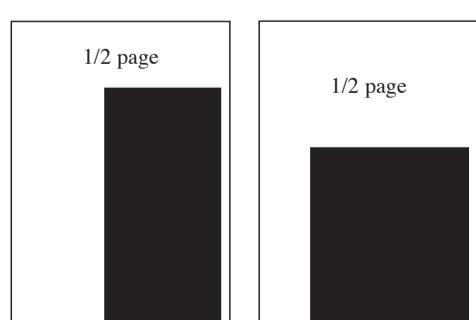
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Super 1/4:	1 month\$310 6 months\$279 12 months\$248
1/2 page:	1 month\$380 6 months\$342 12 months\$304
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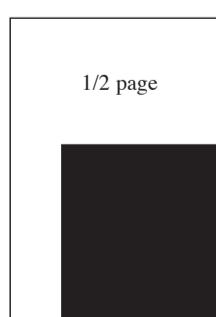
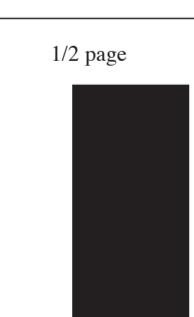
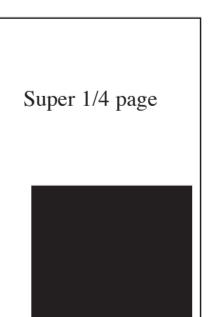
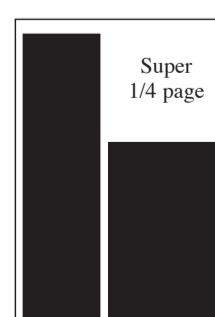
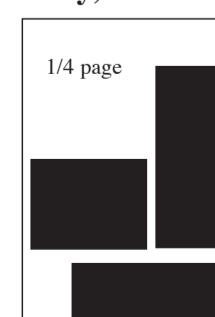
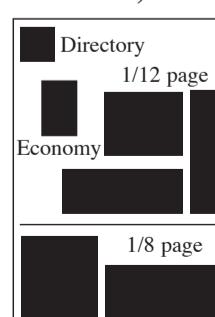
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Where does the beef dollar go? Live market? Packers? Retailers?

Op-ed by **BILL BULLARD**
CEO, R-CALF USA

For many years we've analyzed the relationship between retail beef prices and cattle prices and how the share of the consumers' beef dollar is allocated to each segment of the beef supply chain, which includes the live cattle segment, packer segment, and retailer segment.

Let's look at how the marketplace allocated the live cattle segments' share of each consumer beef dollar.

The live cattle segment is the segment that makes by far the largest contribution to the final beef product. Now the only ingredient in beef is cattle.

And it is the live cattle segment that must maintain a mother cow herd year-round, breed them, and then raise the resultant calves for 15-24 months before they're ready for slaughter, so the live cattle segment's contribution to the final beef product is measured in years.

The contribution made by the other two segments – the packers and retailers, is measured only in weeks due to the perishable nature of beef.

Since it makes the largest contribution to the final beef product, one would naturally assume that the largest share of the consumers' beef dollar would be allocated to the live cattle segment.

Let's take a look. I have data beginning from 1980, and from 1980 through 1994 the live cattle segment, as we would expect, received the majority of the consumers' beef dollar.

In fact, in 1980 the live cattle segment received a vast majority – 63%, and that means the packers and retailers together shared the remaining 37% of the consumers' beef dollar.

But since 1995, the year after NAFTA went into effect, and for the next 16 years, the live cattle segment received only a minority of the consumers' beef dollar, and it wasn't until the widespread drought from late 2010 to early 2013 accelerated the contraction of our U.S. cow herd, which shrunk supplies relative to the strong demand, that the cattle industry again received the majority share of the consumers' beef dollar.

But this reprieve was short lived. During only the narrow, 5-year period from 2011 through 2015 did the live cattle segment again receive the majority share of the consumers' beef dollar and it ranged from slightly over 50% until 2015 when it increased to slightly under 56%.

And then beginning in 2016, it went south again. In 2021, just four decades from when the live cattle segment received 63% of the consumers' beef dollar, the allocation of those dollars was flipped on its head. That year the live cattle segment received only 37% of the consumers' beef dollar and the packers and retailers, together, shared the vast majority – 63% of the beef dollar.

For nine more years the live cattle segment received only a minority share and it wasn't until well after the more recent widespread drought, which began in mid-

2020 and which, again, accelerated the decades-long contraction of the U.S. cow herd, that the live cattle segment once again received the majority of the consumers' beef dollar, and that was in 2024.

The share then was only slightly above 50 percent. Data show that the live cattle segment's share has been over 50% during the first eight months of 2025.

Let's summarize: Before NAFTA, which was three decades ago, the live cattle segment received the vast majority of the consumers' beef dollar. But for the three decades after NAFTA, there was only two periods when the live cattle sector again received the majority share. The first was during the five-year period following the drought that started in 2010, and the second was last year and this year, following the drought that began in 2020.

So, what does this tell us? Well, it tells us that during the pre-NAFTA years, when there was far less market concentration and far less globalization, the competitive market allocated to the live cattle segment its competitive, majority share of the consumer beef dollar.

But during the three decades after NAFTA while the

marketplace was highly concentrated and the U.S. was entering numerous free trade agreements, something was interfering with the overall competitiveness of the marketplace and the live cattle segment's rightful share of the consumer beef dollar was redirected to the packers and retailers.

And, the only two exceptions during the past three decades occurred when our U.S. cattle inventory was shocked by acute climatic conditions that accelerated the decades-long contraction of the live cattle segment.

In other words, the marketplace, from the cattle producer all the way to the consumer, is fundamentally broken and the only time it functions properly is when it is confronted with a significant market shock – a market shock so severe that the supply-demand equation becomes extremely imbalanced.

Got an idea for a story you'd like to see in The Advocate? Drop us a line and let us know at: cattlemen@virtualimages.us

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Biscuit pretzel bites with dipping sauce make a good 'game day' snack

Made and reviewed by CHARLOTTE ANGELL
Rated by JON ANGELL
For The Advocate

Jon's Critique: This is a good one for "game day" or other social gatherings. They tasted really good and plated up with an enticing look about them. I wasn't a fan of the cheese dip like the CA test kitchen cook was, my preference was easily with the mustard sauce. The bite size make them a hand snack or appetizer.

As far as left overs are concerned, I'll admit that the following day I grabbed a couple cold out of the fridge that ate just fine.

Biscuit Pretzel Bites with Cocktail Wieners, Nacho Cheese and Mustard Dipping Sauce

Foodnet.work.com

Biscuit Pretzel Bites

Two 16-ounce cans refrigerated biscuit dough

Two 14-ounce packages smoked cocktail sausages

½ cup baking soda

1 egg, lightly beaten

Pretzel salt, for topping

Nacho Cheese Dipping sauce

6 ounces shredded yellow

American cheese (1 ½ cups)
6 ounces shredded mild yellow cheddar (1 ½ cups)
1 Tablespoon cornstarch
½ teaspoon ground cayenne, or to taste
One 12-ounce can evaporated milk
Note: This makes a lot of cheese sauce

Mustard Sauce

6 tablespoons grainy Dijon mustard
2 tablespoons honey
1 tablespoon hot sauce
1 tablespoon red wine vinegar

Preheat the oven to 400 degrees. Line 2 rimmed baking sheets with parchment

Separate each biscuit into individual biscuits. Cut each biscuit into quarters. Press 1 piece of biscuit dough into about a 1-by-3 inch strip.

Place 1 smoked cocktail sausage in the center of the dough strip, then roll tightly and pinch the edges of the dough to seal.

Place on one of the prepared baking sheets. Repeat with remaining dough and sausages.

Meanwhile, heat 6 cups water in a large saucepan over medium-high heat until rapidly simmering.

Stir in the baking soda, slow-

ly, until dissolved, it will fizz aggressively when it is first added, then die down quickly.

Lower 2 to 3 of the wrapped cocktail sausages into the simmering water. Simmer until the dough just starts to puff slightly and the bites float, 10 to 15 seconds.

Remove with a slotted spoon and let the excess water drain, then return to the prepared baking sheets, leaving about 1 inch of space between each piece. Repeat with the remaining wrapped cocktail sausages.

Brush the bites all over with the beaten egg, then sprinkle with pretzel salt. Bake until the sausages are warmed through and the biscuit dough is a deep

golden brown and cooked through, 20 to 25 minutes.

For the nacho cheese dipping sauce: Meanwhile, combine the cheeses in a medium saucepan and sprinkle with the cornstarch and cayenne.

Toss the cheese until coated in the cornstarch mixture. Add the evaporated milk and set the pan over medium-low heat.

Cook, whisking often, until the cheese is melted and the sauce is smooth and hot, 3 to 4 minutes. Add more cayenne if desired.

Cover and keep warm until ready to serve.

Mustard dipping sauce: In a medium bowl, whisk the mustard, honey, hot sauce and vine-



gar with a splash of warm water. Taste for seasoning, set aside.

Serve the bites with the nacho cheese sauce and the mustard sauce.

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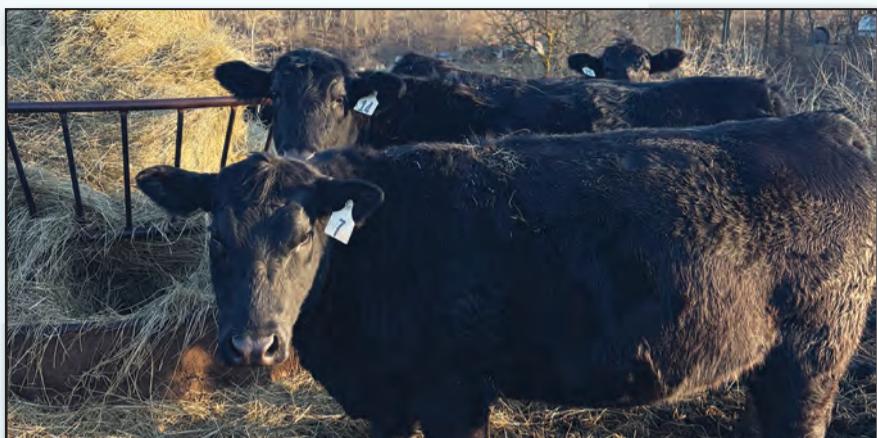
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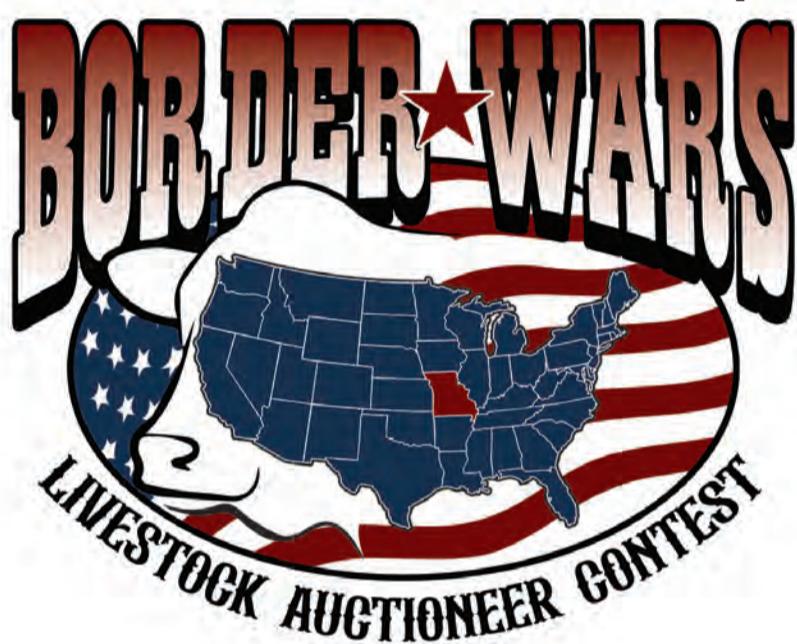
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January

Friday, January 30Regular Friday sale

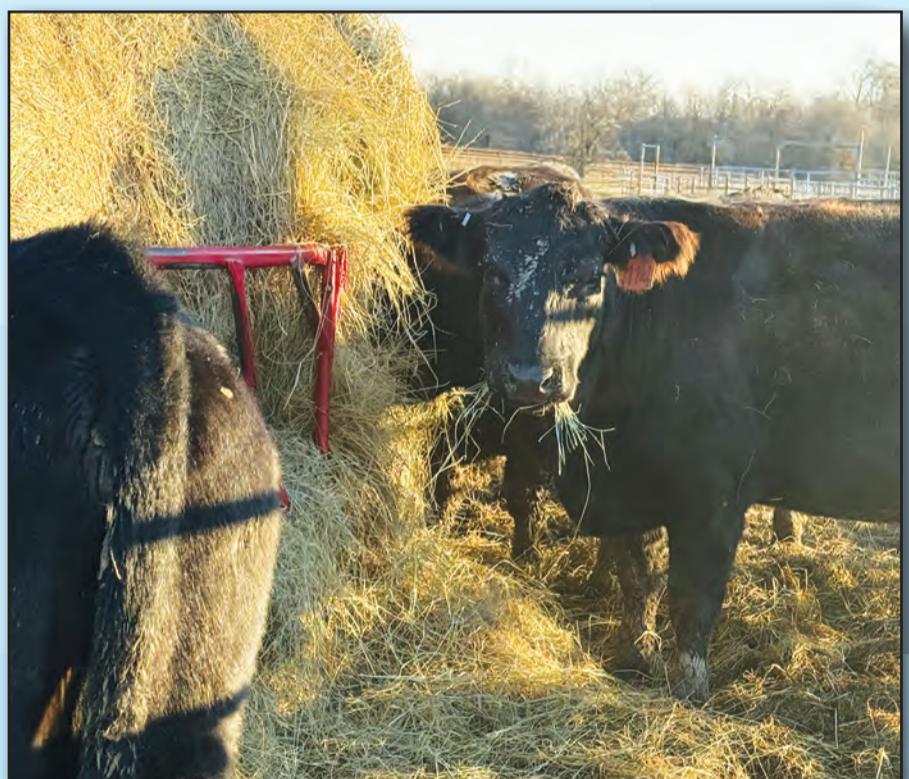
February

Friday, February 6Regular Friday sale

Friday, February 13Special feeder sale with regular Friday sale

Friday, February 20Bred cow sale with regular Friday sale

Friday, February 27Special feeder sale with regular Friday sale



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