

# Meat Messenger

## North Dakota State Meat Inspection Program

North Dakota Department of Agriculture

March 2004

### **Wurst Shop Finds New Markets Under State Inspection**

Business has been steadily increasing over the past few years, say Ed and Art Wanner, owners of the Wurst Shop in Dickinson. The cousins established the company in 1999, and they specialize in making a wide variety of sausage products.

The Wurst Shop came under state inspection in 2002, after the business relocated to a facility on the north side of Dickinson.

“We had other businesses that wanted to serve and handle our products,” explains Ed Wanner. “Being under inspection gave us the opportunity to have our product in restaurants and clubs throughout the Dickinson area.”

The plant currently provides their line of products for about 10-15 different establishments throughout the southwestern part of the state and the Wanners’ say they are always looking for new outlets to carry their products.

“In the future we would like to continue to expand into different areas with our products, and become more diversified and utilize our establishment in other ways to meet the needs of our customers,” Ed Wanner says. “We strive to deliver consistent, quality products.”

The plant employs four full time employees and two part-time employees and offers a variety of smoked meats, fresh products and deer processing. The plant produces approximately thirty different products and features many different varieties of their country style and summer sausages.



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### **AAMP, Other Associations Meet with USDA, Ag Committee Staffs on Interstate Shipment**

The American Association of Meat Processors and other trade associations have met with top USDA staff, as well as staffers on the House and Senate Agriculture Committees, on behalf of legalizing interstate commerce for state inspected meat and poultry products. The meetings have been good, and progress is being made toward the goal of changing the law so that the economic markets for such meat and poultry products can be expanded. The meetings resulted from the decision of the Meat Association Council (MAC), a coalition of all the national, regional and many state meat processor associations, to support Interstate Shipment.

The meetings began in early January with AAMP and other trade associations meeting in Washington, DC, to develop strategies for introducing such legislation and gathering support for it in Congress. Later in the month, the groups met with top USDA officials at a meeting set up by Bernise Shire, AAMP Director of Legislative & Regulatory Affairs. At the meeting, the Administration voiced support for Interstate Shipment and indicated it was interested in the outcome

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of comprehensive reviews of the state inspection programs now being done by USDA.

Following this meeting with USDA, industry meetings were set up with staffers of the House and Senate Agriculture Committees. The House people told us that House Agriculture Committee Chairman Bob Goodlatte (R-VA) supports Interstate Shipment and “wants to get it done.” The Senate staffers said that having the meat industry united in support of legislation will be very beneficial to that goal. In fact, the legislation, which was agreed to initially by AAMP, AMI and NASDA, is also being supported by NCBA (the Cattlemen), NPPC (the Pork Producers), the American Farm Bureau, the Food Marketing Institute and other groups.

The stakeholder groups will be meeting in the next few weeks to decide on the next step to take; which it likely will be to begin getting prime sponsors for the legislation. Once that happens, state meat processing associations will be able to meet with members of their state Congressional delegations to get co-sponsors for the Interstate Shipment legislation.

## **Protein Diets & Flavor Drives Bacon Demand**

*Meat Industry Internet News, March, 2004*

With the popularity of high-protein diets and the quest for fast-food flavor, Americans are bringing home the bacon more than ever before. The once-maligned meat product is being served on fast-food hamburgers, sprinkled on salads, and is back on breakfast tables after being replaced years ago by bagels, croissants, and doughnuts.

The surge in bacon has been good news for U.S. hog and pork producers. Prices for pork bellies, the cut of pork that is sliced into bacon, are at record highs for this time of year and are largely responsible for the attractive prices producers are receiving for hogs. “We have a lot of people on these high protein diets who are not only eating bacon with their sandwiches, but we also have an increase in bacon consumption at breakfast time,” said Ron Plain, agricultural economist at the University of Missouri. “We’ve had a strong bacon market for several years as it seems bacon has become very popular as a condiment on turkey sandwiches and hamburgers and stuff,” he said.

Consumers following the Atkins diet, which advocates high protein intake, are switching to meat from high carbohydrate breads and pastries. This has increased demand for bacon, which had already reestablished itself as a consumer favorite.

Demand for bacon waned in the 1970s when U.S. consumers began avoiding fats as well as meats cured with nitrates. But that changed in the 1980s with the invention of the bacon burger, and the fast food industry became the engine that drove demand to the levels seen today.

Retail prices for bacon in the 1970’s ranged from 80 cents to \$1.29 per lb. By the 1980’s it was going for \$3.00 a lb or more, and current retail prices range as high as \$5.50 a lb and average over \$3.00 a lb nationally. Wholesale prices went from 35 cents a lb in the 1970’s to as much as \$1.00 or more a lb in the past couple of years.

The demand for bacon has fueled a steep increase in prices for pork bellies, which are hovering near \$1.00 per lb, the highest level ever for this time of year, economists said. “The monthly average wholesale price (for February) last year was the highest ever at 79.5 cents per lb. This year the average could be in the 90’s,” Plain said. Even higher prices are likely when bacon demand peaks this summer, the most popular time of year for BLTs, or bacon-lettuce-and-tomato sandwiches. “I can see (pork bellies) being \$1.55 to \$1.60 (per lb) when we get into the summer,” said Charlie Andrew, managing director for Chicago- based AAA Meats. “The demand for bacon is just phenomenal.”

Pork belly prices averaged \$1.02 last July. Bacon prices should remain high because supplies will likely remain tight. The rapid use of pork bellies now may mean fewer supplies this summer when bacon demand is expected to peak. Pork belly prices are also getting a boost from strong demand for pork in general, particularly among exporters. More pork is being sought by foreign buyers who have banned U.S. beef and poultry due to animal diseases including mad cow and bird flu. Japan, the top overseas market for U.S. meat, will need a lot of pork because it is not importing any beef from the U.S. or Canada, economists said.

“Last year was our 12th consecutive record year for pork exports and this year will probably be our 13th,” Plain said.

## **Feds Study Cattle-ID System**

*The Wichita Eagle, March 14 2004*

Picture this recipe for disaster: A test comes back positive for foot and mouth disease on two steers in a Kansas feedlot. With today's incomplete tracking system, the disease could spread rapidly to several states before potentially infected animals could be traced. But a better system is in the future if the U.S. Department of Agriculture meets its goal for a national Animal Identification Program.

The proposed program would require traceback — determining the origin of the animal and every place it's been — within 48 hours. Such a traceback system would provide details of the movement of every affected animal from birth. That would provide the ability to pinpoint the origin of the outbreak and halt its spread. It would also help reduce losses to the industry by reducing the number of animals that would potentially have to be slaughtered.

The USDA has been working on developing an individual animal identification system since 1996. But it has been pushed to the front burner after the discovery of a single case of mad cow disease in a dairy herd in Washington state Dec. 23.

The current proposal is for a phased-in system. The first phase is creating a database of locations that manage or hold cattle, to be implemented by July. The next phase would require animals to have an electronic ear tag when they leave their herd of origin. Cattle shipped across state lines would have to be tagged by July 2005. Those shipped within the state would have to be tagged by July 2006. The third phase would require tracing of animals through slaughter. "Traceback for disease control is the goal," said Dale Blasi, livestock economist for Kansas State University Research. "This program is not about marketing or consumer information or databases on ranches. It's about animal health and shutting down an epidemic."

That is reassuring news for ranchers who oppose a nationwide identification program because they fear it will make their private business records accessible from a public database or leave them liable if meat is recalled. "This is a litigious society," Blasi said. "I don't blame people for having that concern. But the government's goal in the program is animal health. The traceback will be from the packer back to the ranch."

The system would not provide a way to trace the meat from an individual animal through the packing plant. Retailers would get information to tell them which plant their meat came from and what day it was processed but not which steak came from what ranch. For consumers, the payback on an identification program may well be better beef, more consistent quality in beef products and safer food. "Information is power," said Warren Weibert, owner of Decatur Feeders. "The more you know about how each animal is doing, the more improvements you can make in future calves." Eventually, he said, technology such as electronic ear tags and automated computer databases of individual animal health and performance can be used to lower costs of production, improve the quality of beef, make food safer and ensure that animal welfare procedures are followed.

While work is under way on a nationwide program, many states — including Kansas — are exploring their own programs for animal identification. In Kansas, the House has already passed a state animal identification bill and the Senate has begun debate on its version of the same bill. Both would offer a more rapid timetable for implementing a program than the federal government is suggesting. That has worried many producers who are concerned about duplicate programs or a Kansas program that is in conflict with federal regulations. Blasi said the benefit for Kansas producers is the opportunity to influence the language of the federal legislation.

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## **Demand for bison hits all-time high**

*Meatingplace.com, March 2004*

Demand for bison meat, buoyed by the popularity of high-protein diets and novelty dinners, hit an all-time high as a record 34,444 animals were slaughtered in 2003, a 36 percent increase over 2002, according to the National Bison Association. "This is a remarkable increase in demand," said Dave Carter, executive director of the Westminster, Colo.-based National Bison Association. "People are getting beyond the misconception that this is a tough, gamey meat."

The low fat content of buffalo meat and the marketing clout of Ted Turner, whose Ted's Montana Grill chain has introduced the meat to a new group of consumers, are also contributing factors to the surge in popularity, according to industry experts. Of course, bison sales were also boosted by the discovery of bovine spongiform encephalopathy in a dairy cow in Washington state last year. Montana is the nation's largest bison producer with 38,000 head. Colorado is fifth with an estimated 15,000.

### **ND Meat Processor's Association Convention: April 23&24, 2004**

Valley City Eagles, Valley City ND

Contact Eileen Myers at 701-743-4451 for more information.

### **Comments on USDA's BSE regulations to Congress. Deadline -April 12, 2004**

Send Comments to: FSIS Docket Clerk, Docket #03-0251F  
102 Cotton Annex, 300 12<sup>th</sup> St. SW  
Washington, DC 20250

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