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**Agri-Pulse Guest Opinion: NFU Calls for a New Direction for the Beef Checkoff;**

**Praises Secretary Vilsack for Seeking Public Comments**

WASHINGTON (Dec. 1, 2014) – National Farmers Union (NFU) President Roger Johnson today called for a ‘new direction’ for the current beef checkoff program in an Agri-Pulse [guest column](http://www.agri-pulse.com/Opinion-Time-for-a-new-direction-for-the-beef-checkoff-12012014.asp), while also praising Secretary of Agriculture Tom Vilsack for seeking public comment on how to strengthen and modernize the outdated program.

“The checkoff program as we know it today has remained virtually unchanged for three decades while the world around it has morphed dramatically,” said Johnson. “This has raised serious doubts about the structure of the checkoff and whether it is capable of appropriately funding the much-needed research and exploring the new markets and new opportunities that the American beef industry so desperately needs. Clearly, the beef checkoff is in dire need of a major course correction.”

 Johnson noted that the current checkoff’s need for change stemmed from the fact that it is both underfunded and unacceptably inflexible. Johnson offered principles to guide adequate reform of the program under the Commodity, Promotion, Research and Information Act of 1996.

“The modernized beef checkoff should be a single program, modeled after the 1996 Act,” said Johnson. “It would have a clear separation of the policy organization from the non-political, promotional checkoff entity… exclude processors and importers from positions of leadership, ensuring that beef producers are always at the helm… and be precluded from allocating a single dime to any organization engaged in lobbying.”

“The idea of bringing new ideas and much-needed change to the checkoff is nothing new, and in fact, organizations like NFU met for three years discussing a new direction,” noted Johnson. “But the meetings were a bridge to nowhere, because they were largely controlled by the organization that has a vested interest in making sure the current structure never changes. That organization, of course, is the National Cattlemen’s Beef Association (NCBA).”

Johnson also noted that NCBA’s motivation for obstructing each and every idea should have been predictable, considering over 97 percent of all Beef Board contracts went to the NCBA, and the organization relies on the current program for a vast majority of its funding.

“NCBA regards the checkoff as its own personal financial trough and will do everything possible to cement that status into eternity,” said Johnson. “Clearly, NCBA wants to protect its turf and its income stream, but its days of living off the checkoff slush fund need to come to an end.”

Johnson commended Secretary Vilsack for stepping into the fractured discussions of the beef checkoff working group and allowing industry stakeholders to submit comments on ways the checkoff should be reformed.

“Finally, other voices and new ideas will be heard and given thoughtful consideration,” said Johnson. “Finally, after three long, frustrating years, meaningful structural change is actually a real possibility.

“The beauty of our democracy is that programs like the checkoff can be regularly scrutinized, fine-tuned or reformed. Recognizing that the success of the checkoff is an integral part of the success of rural America, let us work together to move this program forward. The promise of tomorrow relies on the changes of today.”

*National Farmers Union has been working since 1902 to protect and enhance the economic well-being and quality of life for family farmers, ranchers and rural communities through advocating grassroots-driven policy positions adopted by its membership.*

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