

STOP THE OKLAHOMA BEEF CHECKOFF INCREASE

The Oklahoma Cattlemen's Association is holding a referendum to double the beef checkoff tax assessed on cattle producers. Voting began October 2, 2017 and will conclude on November 1, 2017.

BACKGROUND

A \$1.00 tax is imposed every time cattle are sold. This is the "Beef Checkoff" imposed by federal law, and Oklahoma ranchers pay about \$3 million per year. Half goes to the Oklahoma Beef Council (OBC), and half goes to the national Cattlemen's Beef Board. The Oklahoma Cattlemen's Association (OCA), with approval of the Oklahoma Department of Agriculture, Food and Forestry, is holding an election to add another \$1 tax each time cattle are sold.

SPECIFIC ISSUES

- Last year, it was discovered that \$2.6 million in Oklahoma checkoff fees were embezzled by the Oklahoma Beef Council (OBC) bookkeeper from 2009 to 2016. Doubling the beef checkoff tax on cattle producers would raise an additional \$3 million for the OBC, which has not released any audits or detailed expenditures on how the current checkoff funds are being expended.
- OCA and the other proponents of this new checkoff highlight that the existing checkoff funds result in a \$11.20 return on investment to the industry, but since 2014 cattle producers have seen a 43% drop in cattle prices and a 22% drop in the farm share of the retail beef dollar. The "industry" may be making money off the checkoff, but Oklahoma cattle producers are getting less today.
- OCA launched a petition drive in 2015, and it took the organization nearly two years to collect their stated requirement of 5,100 signatures to bring the issue to a statewide vote. OCA cleared their stated signature requirement by only 77 signatures. The Oklahoma Department of Agriculture, Food and Forestry certified signatures from out of state interests and children who are not old enough to even sign their own names.
- There is no requirement that the beef checkoff funds be used to market only Oklahoma beef; current checkoff funds are used to market foreign beef for Brazil's JBS as well as other foreign importers.
- The referendum on Oklahoma cattle producers allows children, corporations, and out-of-state interests to vote. If OCA is successful, all Oklahoma cattle producers will be required to pay the increase.
- While the backers of the measure state that a cattle producer may ask for a refund, no specific details on how a refund may be requested have been provided.

For these and many other reasons Oklahoma cattle producers should just say no; now is not the time to double the tax on the backs of Oklahoma cattle producers. We should not consider an increase of the checkoff assessment to \$2 until the abuses within the Oklahoma Beef Council are fully resolved. *Producers must vote and must vote "No" to stop this checkoff increase. Only the votes of those voting will be counted, meaning if a producer does not vote, he/she will be helping the proposed increase to pass.*

The vote is to be held on November 1, 2017 at any Oklahoma county extension office during normal business hours. Mail-in ballots are available from October 2-20, 2017 by calling 405-235-4391 or emailing okbeefcheckoff@gmail.com and must be postmarked by October 27, 2017.