Assuming talks begin by June, the two countries have a month to come to terms before President Bush signs the FTA on June 30. Congress won't take up free trade until fall, by which time legislators should have a pretty clear picture of how U.S. beef fared with the checklist.

Baucus told *Meatingplace* he already knows all he needs to know — as does Korea. "American beef is the safest and most delicious in the world," he says. "I've met over and over again with the Korean ambassador; I've had Korean officials to Montana to eat Montana steaks; and I've even eaten a Montana steak in front of the Korean press and told the Korean people — in Korean — just how good our beef is. I won't stop until they've gotten the message and opened their market."

United States Trade Representative spokesman Steve Norton says it's "much too early to tell" whether there is sufficient political will to stop an FTA in the event beef negotiations go south.

He did, however, concede, "It's difficult to see how an FTA could clear Congress without a reopening of Korea's beef market."

ddressed, so the plant can be re-listed or exports to Japan," says Cargill pokesman Mark Klein.

Later in April, the *Associated Press* eported — incorrectly, it turned out — hat Cargill was phasing out sow gestaion crates. "We aren't phasing them ut," Klein says. "The article was a misnterpretation of a letter."

Which was about the best news Cargill iad during the whole month, except for he fact that parent company Cargill Inc. saw profits soar by 49 percent in the hird quarter.

But that's hardly news, is it?

Q+A

ANIMAL KINGDOM


Goldin

Okay, so the numbers aren't that big, but a Burger King initiative to purchase 2 percent of its eggs and 10 percent of its pork from sources that don't cage animals puts the fast-fooder well ahead of the curve on the issue of humane animal handling. Celebrity chef Wolfgang Puck (see Buzzmeter, p. 5) likewise announced his restaurants will serve only crate-free pork and veal. Bob Goldin, executive director of Chicago-based foodservice consultancy Technomic, thinks the two chains are on to something.

So what's driving establishments like Burger King to shift to humane methods of animal production?

I think it's just a matter of momentum. Consumers appear to be increasingly concerned about a number of social issues, including minimum wage, health insurance and the environment. Animal welfare is one of those issues.

Is there really demand for product that derives from good animal welfare practices?

We just performed a study that asked restaurant goers to prioritize 14 social issues, including the environment, minimum wage, sweat shops, corporate giving ... just a broad range of topics. Animal welfare ranked No. 3, ahead of the environment.

Does that drive results in the market?

I don't know if there's a way to quantify it, though we're going to set up a tracking system to [try]. It's just one of those intangibles. On the other hand, companies have everything to gain from a public-relations standpoint.

So "animal-friendly" presents new marketing opportunities?

Absolutely. I think there's a business-building benefit to it. Look at Burger King. They got millions of dollars worth of good press.

What's the disadvantage for a company that isn't involved in welfare-minded production?

I think it's going become increasingly imperative for businesses to demonstrate social responsibility and responsiveness. It's going to become a condition of doing business. Is it going to happen today? Maybe not. Many consumers still want low-cost product regardless of how it was raised.

$171.03

the average wholesale price per 100 pounds for Choice-grade beef in mid-April, the highest level since November 2003