

Checkoff receives clean bill of health

By Drovers news source (2/14/2008)

How well do you know your checkoff? Without prompting, 87 percent had heard of the program, and 68 percent consider themselves somewhat or very well informed, according to a recent study by Aspen Media & Market Research, Boulder, Colo. In total, random telephone interviews were conducted with a representative sample of 1,225 beef and dairy producers nationwide between Dec. 27, 2007 and Jan. 10, 2008 to determine their awareness of, attitudes toward, and concerns about the Beef Checkoff Program.

"The Cattlemen's Beef Board (CBB) has conducted this independent survey biannually throughout the history of the checkoff to make sure it's funding the programs and producing the results cattle producers who pay the checkoff expect of their program," says CBB member Richard Nielson, a producer from Ephraim, Utah, and chair of the Joint Producer Communications Committee. "In addition, the results of this survey help guide program recommendations of the producer communications committee. Our ultimate goal is to develop a plan of work for communicating information about Beef Checkoff Program investments to the beef and dairy producers, and importers who pay the checkoff, with particular emphasis on providing clear, consistent and no-nonsense answers to producer questions."

The study found that producers continue to have very favorable attitudes toward the beef checkoff program. Currently 7 in 10 approve of the program. The results have been similar over time. In the past five years, approval rates have ranged between 68 percent and 73 percent. Producers' support for the checkoff program has been consistent over the years — during the past decade, a majority always have approved of it, with positive ratings of 60 percent or more.

For the most part, checkoff support has remained steady in spite of changing economic conditions or extensive news coverage. Economic conditions have been cyclical — they have improved and declined. Nielson notes that while economic conditions have influenced producers' outlook toward their industry, this has not had a large effect upon their approval levels regarding the checkoff. "These surveys establish benchmarks and identify areas of focus for future communications planning," he adds.

When producers are "very well informed" about checkoff activities, they're more likely to report a higher approval rating. The research also found that the proportion of producers who disapprove of the checkoff has remained virtually unchanged in the past 12 months. Moreover, the disapproval rates have remained lower in the past few years.

Industry leadership last year recommended that producer communications be again conducted by CBB directly. "By bringing producer communications under the direction of the CBB, we hope producers hear about their checkoff investments *directly* rather than through a contractor," continues Nielson. "This isn't to suggest we weren't doing a good job in the past. On the contrary. Two-thirds of producers polled reported they are very or somewhat well informed, which means our messages are on target. What this ultimately shows is a positive correlation between improved and targeted communications efforts and educated producers. This is a good indicator of program success"

Knowledge and education about the beef checkoff continue to be predictors of favorability toward it. Producers who are "very" or "somewhat" well informed are more likely to approve of the checkoff, particularly among those who say they are very well informed. Among this group, 79 percent approve of the program (48 percent of them strongly), while only 14 percent disapprove.

A program with the visibility of the checkoff is bound to be talked about or in the news from time to time. It is important to find out just how visible the program is and how producers perceive the coverage. The results indicate that many producers continue to pay attention to recent checkoff news: the visibility of the program remains high. Currently, half of producers have seen, read, or heard something about the beef checkoff in the past six months.

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