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Pork Producers welcome Food Safety bill as 'positive first step'

By Jon H. Harsch

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Reacting to the House passage of food safety legislation Thursday evening in a 283-142 vote, National Pork Producers Council (NPPC) President Don Butler said "NPPC is pleased that the bill passed today, addressing our on-farm concerns. . . America's pork producers support strengthening the nation's food safety system. The House bill moves us in the right direction, but work remains."

A statement from NPPC explained that the version of the bill passed by the House is an improvement over the original version that House Energy and Commerce Committee passed on a voice vote in June. The NPPC statement noted that the Food Safety Enhancement Act of 2009, H.R. 2749, "would give the Food and Drug Administration the framework for a risk-based inspection system and move the agency toward a preventive approach to food safety regulation" and would "give the FDA new authorities to address food-borne-illness outbreaks and regulate processors' record keeping in hopes of more easily identifying these outbreaks."

Noting that the bill enjoys broad bipartisan support, Butler said "NPPC is grateful to Chairman Henry Waxman (D-CA), Ranking Member Joe Barton (R-TX), and Chairman Collin Peterson (D-MN) for reaching compromise language contained in the bill. NPPC also appreciates the help of the many Energy and Commerce and Agriculture Committee members who voiced concerns regarding the impacts that the bill would have on America's pork producers."

The NPPC statement adds that:

- "NPPC supports language in the bill that recognizes the U.S. Department of Agriculture's authorities over products, facilities and farms raising animals from which meat and eggs are regulated under the Federal Meat Inspection Act, the Poultry Products Inspection Act or the Egg Products Inspection Act."
- "NPPC is also very supportive of the grains exemption which helps our diversified pork producers. Other improvements to the bill relate to traceability of food and record-keeping. The measure also takes a more targeted approach for the new authority granted to the FDA to prohibit or restrict the movement of food."

- “NPPC appreciates the strengthening of language that requires the Secretary of Health and Human Services to consult with the Secretary of Agriculture.”
- “While pork producers continue to suffer record losses, NPPC is committed to food safety and believes that the bill is a positive first step toward securing effective and meaningful food safety reform legislation.”
- “We are thankful that the Preservation of Antibiotics for Medical Treatment Act of 2009 (PAMTA) was not included in this food safety bill.”

The proposed PAMTA legislation would ban using human-health antibiotics for routine non-therapeutic use with livestock and poultry. During Thursday’s debate on the Food Safety bill, PAMPA sponsor Rep. Louise Slaughter (D-NY) said that while the Food Safety bill did not include her antibiotics bill, “My plan is to make a strong push on this legislation later this year.”

For background on the food safety debate, go to www.Agri-Pulse.com and listen to our Wednesday audio update. Go to <http://www.agri-pulse.com/uploaded/20090730H.pdf> and <http://www.agri-pulse.com/uploaded/20090730H1.pdf> to read about House action on the Food Safety bill.

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