

Virginia Cattlemen's Association

The resource and advocacy group of the Virginia cattle industry

2016 Policy for State & National Issues

(revised June 10, 2016)

It is the purpose of the Virginia Cattlemen's Association to address the legislative, regulatory, environmental and social needs of our industry.

Cattle Marketing

- The Association believes that Virginia agricultural policy should assure a free, private enterprise driven and competitive marketing system for cattle. We support a producer's ability to make marketing decisions that will benefit them individually and is best suited for their specific production situation.
- Virginia agricultural policy in regard to marketing of cattle should not,
 1. Guarantee profit
 2. Restrict operation of the competitive market place
 3. Dictate who may participate in the marketing environment
- The Association believes interstate highway weight limits should conform to a unified national policy to legally transport live cattle from the farm or marketplace. The interstate highway system is critical for marketing of Virginia feeder cattle and these highways should allow for greater competitiveness by allowing weight limits similar in all states.
- The Association is opposed to **mandatory** Country of Origin Labeling (mCOOL).

Commodity Programs Policy

- The Association believes that Virginia agricultural policy should assure a free, private enterprise driven and competitive marketing system for commodities. Any commodity program must include thorough consideration of the impact of subsidies and guarantees for given commodities on other commodities as a result of such policy.
- The Association believes it is not in the best interest of the producer or the Commonwealth to,
 1. Set prices
 2. Underwrite inefficient production
 3. Manipulate supply, demand, cost or price
- The Association opposes arbitrary decisions affecting the production, use or marketing of agricultural commodities without sound scientific and/or economic validation.
- The Association opposes creation of excise tax commodity assessments without initial consent and support of said commodity producers, or targeted special interest taxed, under assessment plan.
- The Association supports the maintenance of a Virginia state cattle assessment program that is disseminated at the will of Virginia cattle producers.

Cattle Care

- The Association supports responsible use and production of cattle for food, fiber, work, education, exhibition and research conducted for the benefit of both cattle and humans.
- The Association supports the Beef Quality Assurance standards for cattle handling, nutrition, management and animal health practices.
- The Association supports cattle care decisions made in the best scientific knowledge and professional experience. State policy is not a place to dictate animal care standards or a platform for special interest groups to set animal care standards through legislation.
- The Association supports the advancement of cattle care practices through **research and education** particularly advancements supported by the utilization of Checkoff dollars.
- The Association opposes state and local actions that are burdensome, unreasonable and unnecessary that are **not based in science** that adversely affect the ability of a cattle producer to care for or sustainably endeavor to produce cattle.
- The Association opposes investigation of animal care by untrained or unsupervised citizen volunteers or those employed by non-governmental supported agencies.

Cattle Health

- The Association supports the efforts of the Virginia Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services to preserve the Commonwealth's USDA compliant standing for disease prevention and eradication programs.
- The Association supports animal health regulations that are minimally invasive on direct cattle production management and preserve individual rights to manage land, water and other on farm natural resources.
- The Association opposes animal health regulations that restrict participation in foreign markets.
- The Association recognizes the threat of foreign animal diseases to the health and economic value of the Virginia cattle business and supports continued enforcement of unburden some and effective regulations to protect cattle against the movement of cattle with unknown health status into and within Virginia.
- The Association supports efforts of the State Veterinarian's office to determine if Virginia should have import regulations for Trichomoniasis, a bovine venereal disease, testing of cattle or acceptance of cattle from known areas where Trichomoniasis is endemic.
- The Association opposes transfer of livestock industry programs from USDA, FDA and related agencies to Virginia Department of Agriculture & Consumer Services where disease monitoring program transfer of responsibility results in excessive costs, added regulatory and inspection burden and/or vague requirements for implementation and adherence.

Animal Damage Control

- The Association recognizes the threat of natural predators to cattle operations and supports counter measures that are biologically sound as well as effective.
- The Association supports predator control programs that are private or public in nature and encourages cooperation between the sectors for solutions that best fit individual operations.

- The Association encourages continued support for livestock predator control through the USDA Wildlife Services agents.
- The Association supports re-examination of The Migratory Bird Treaty Act to allow for more invasive and comprehensive control of nuisance species of birds and particularly the Black Vulture which causes threat to livestock and hardship to livestock producers through limited means of control.

Economic Development

- The Association supports efforts and programs intended to promote agribusiness and agricultural enterprises in an economically sustainable manner. Economic development of agricultural enterprises should not be hampered by local requirements that are more restrictive than those at the state level.
- The Association supports state policy that encourages increased availability of working capital to farmers at competitive rates and encourages a healthy business environment.
- The Association encourages the state to communicate with industry stakeholders about the health of the agricultural economic and business environment.
- The Association supports efforts to grow domestic and foreign markets and trade opportunities through trade agreements of participating parties.

Energy

- The Association supports production and utilization of energy that is safe, affordable and reliable.
- The Association is opposed to energy production that unfairly alters commodity supplies from availability for traditional uses such as food, fiber and feed.
- The Association supports market based solutions for renewable energy production that are not based in artificial price supports or manipulative of supply and demand.
- The Association opposes efforts by the state to mandate or support specific levels of renewable fuels production.

Land Use and Tax

- The Association encourages all localities to adopt the practice of land use valuation assessment for livestock agricultural operations.
- The Association opposes eligibility for land use assessment being tied to water quality regulations or implementation of conservation best management practices.
- The Association supports the State Land Evaluation and Advisory Council Program as an option for determining land use value tax assessment basis among localities in the Commonwealth.
- The Association recognizes the tremendous value of rented and leased land to cattle production by non-farming landowners in the state and supports state and local land use planning that is not burdensome to animal agriculture production.

- The Association supports protection of cattle producers from liability when they maintain a legally recognized fence.
- The Association supports favorable tax policy for agricultural business development and sustainability that also reflects current industry production practices.
- The Association supports permanent repeal of the Estate Tax.

Food Safety

- The Association supports the inspection of meat processing facilities under current state and federal guidelines for the production of safe meat products.
- The Association opposes efforts to legalize or increase limits of uninspected meat and meat products on a retail level direct to consumers.
- The Association opposes adding meat and meat products to any state or Food & Drug Administration list of “high risk foods” or “potentially hazardous foods”.
- The Association opposes the sale of unpasteurized milk and dairy products to the public.
- The Association supports Dietary Guidelines for Americans that encourage Americans to eat a healthy diet and focus on foods and beverages that help achieve and maintain a healthy weight, promote health and prevent disease. Beef and red meat have been scientifically proven to be a beneficial contributor to a healthy diet and lifestyle as well as a source of valuable nutrients in diets subsidized by USDA funds including school lunch programs.
- The Association recognizes that the utilization of Genetically Modified Organisms in the production of food and/or fiber is sustainable, scientifically validated to be safe for humans and the environment as well as necessary to assist agriculture in meeting the demands of a growing global population for food and fiber products.

Virginia Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services

- The Association recognizes the need and value of a sound cooperative relationship between the private sector and services offered through the Virginia Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services.
- The Association supports dedicated funding for support of weights and measures, grading, inspection and assuring the integrity of agricultural commodities and commodity markets.
- The Association supports adequate funding for the State Veterinarian’s office to provide necessary services for permitting, regulation, disease response and education of livestock producers.-
- The Association supports the Department maintaining inspection and regulatory authority to preserve a sanitary and safe food distribution environment including inspection of all food products and the establishments where food is prepared.
- The Association supports the efforts of the Virginia Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services to expand domestic and export markets for Virginia cultivated and/or processed agricultural products.

Extension, Youth and Higher Education

- The Association supports fulfillment of the *Morrill Act* and Land Grant mission by Virginia Tech and Virginia State University while maintaining a focus on the sustainability of and enhancing agricultural production and businesses.
- The Association supports adequate state funding for Land Grant university programs, initiatives, maintenance and capital improvement projects that enhance outreach and information dissemination to agricultural producers.
- The Association supports Virginia Cooperative Extension and preservation of Agency 229 funding for programs, faculty, facilities (including Agricultural Research & Extension Centers) and services that enhance Extension capability to work with agricultural producers and interests.
- The Association supports Technical and Agricultural Education in public schools, community colleges and vocational programs that enhance skills necessary to prepare youth for work in agriculture and related fields.
- The Association supports 4-H and FFA as valuable leadership development organizations for youth and encourages strong management of both on the state level.

Environment

- The Association recognizes the critical role that natural resources play in sustainable cattle production. Sound science based environmental stewardship is a prerequisite of responsible cattle management.
- The Association supports a private and public partnership to employ best management practices that meet water quality goals developed in a sensible and scientifically based manner.
- The Association supports strict voluntary implementation of water quality best management practices and state funding dedicated to continued cost share availability for their implementation.
- The Association supports a uniform statewide stream fencing cost share program scoring system that prioritizes herd sizes exceeding the state average, requires investigation and consideration of local, state, federal and inter-agency funding sources for the project, prioritizes projects in identified TMDL areas and deemphasizes linear feet of surface water fenced as priority consideration.
- The Association opposes Animal Feeding Operation permitting requirements that are not specific to manure management.
- The Association supports public cost share funding for livestock structures meant to enhance water quality or nutrient management.
- The Association supports the adequate staffing and funding for the Agricultural Stewardship Act and continued management within the Virginia Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services.
- The Association supports land application of bio-solids and other soil amendments in accordance with soil test and/or nutrient management plan recommendation as well as regulation only at the state level.

- The Association supports a data collection system for agricultural best management practices that is comprehensive and inclusive of all implemented practices both voluntary and funded on the local, state and national level.
- The Association opposes state water quality regulations that are more stringent than those required under federal authority and create an unfavorable business environment for agriculture.
- The Association supports consistent and fair administration of the Virginia Pollution Abatement Permit program by the Virginia Department of Environmental Quality.
- The Association recognizes the need for glyphosate containing herbicides in agronomic cropping systems and supports the continued use of glyphosate, which has been scientifically proven to be safe for humans and the environment when used appropriately, in agronomic cropping systems both domestically and internationally.
- The Association recognizes the potential for flash grazing for cattle in the grass riparian buffer areas of stream side fencing Best Management programs and the Association supports utilization of these grass riparian buffers for flash grazing to control invasive weeds in a manner that is environmentally sensitive and affordable to the goals of the active Best Management Program practice.

Legal and Other Regulatory

- The Association supports the national Beef Checkoff and opposes any redistribution of these monies to the state General Fund as prohibited in the Code of Virginia.
- The Association supports the Dillon Rule and the limitation of local government powers in respect to existing state regulation and limitations.
- The Association opposes policies and regulations that restrict the rights of private property owners.
- The Association supports exceptions in Freedom of Information Act requirements that limit disclosure of information relating to regulated programs or actions conducted by the state within their authority in connection with livestock producers and their businesses.

Soil and Water District Conservation Boards

- The Association supports appropriate representation of the agricultural industry, and specifically food animal production, on Soil and Water Conservation District Boards on the local and state level.