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Bison Marketers Working to Address Challenges of Booming Demand
Industry Statement Acknowledges Challenges, But Refuses to ‘Cut Corners’ on Quality

Regina Saskatchewan (September 13, 2010) – With growing consumer demand outpacing the available supply of bison meat, the commercial marketers along with the Canadian Bison Association and National Bison Association have released a joint statement outlining the steps now being taken to work with ranchers in both countries to “grow the herds” of bison in North America.

The statement adopted by the marketers last week acknowledges that the current tight supply situation creates challenges for retailers, restaurant owners, and marketers alike, but stressed that the steps being taken to expand bison herds will require patience from all sectors.

“Bison is a niche product. Bison as a species were perfected by nature into an animal that thrives in the ecosystem in our part of the world. We’re not going to tinker with that. However, this also means that it will take time for our producers to increase production to meet the demand.”

The statement notes that even though sales of bison meat have doubled since 2005, the sector is still a small fraction of the meat marketplace. According

to the statement, the 92,000 head of bison processed in the United States and Canada last year represented less than one-day's processing of beef in the United States.

“Our associations today are working to ‘grow the herd’ of bison across North America by reaching out to producers who are wearying of being a part of commodity agriculture,” the statement reads. “We are conducting workshops across the country on bison production, producing new materials to assist ranchers in making a transition and reaching out to lenders to enhance their understanding the industry so that they are prepared to finance bison operations.”

The marketers developed the joint statement to help inform various participants in the marketplace that the industry is dedicated to expanding available supply, but will not compromise on the protocols that distinguish bison as a natural meat product.

(Editors: The entire industry statement is attached)

Statement of the North American Bison Industry

Developed by the Commercial Marketers of the Canadian Bison Association and the National Bison Association

Barely more than a century ago, the North American Bison teetered on the precipice of extinction, with fewer than 1,000 animals left in existence. Today's bison herd is nearing half million animals thanks in part to retailers and restaurants introducing the American public to the great taste, nutritional attributes, and rich story of bison.

The Canadian Bison Association and National Bison Association have quipped—somewhat tongue-in-cheek—that the best way to save bison was to eat them. That is a fact. The exploding demand for bison meat has helped spur the restoration of bison on the prairies and pastures of North America.

Demand is now outstripping our current supply, which creates significant challenges for our partners in the retail, restaurant, and distribution channels.

Ranchers, processors and marketers want to supply the marketplace with every ounce of bison products requested by your customers. But we also face some challenges that will require patience from everyone as we move forward:

- Bison is not a commodity, it is a niche product. Bison were perfected by nature into a species that thrives in the ecosystem of our part of the world. We're not going to tinker with that. However, this also means that it will take time for our producers to increase production to meet the demand.
- Even though bison processing has reached record levels, we are still a very small industry. The 92,000 head of bison processed in North America last year doubled the level of 2005, but still represent less than one day's processing of cattle in the U.S.
- Bison will continue to be a premium protein product. The very nature of the animal and the production protocols of our industry create a quality, nutritious product that is sustainably raised. We can't cut corners on that one.
- We know that the prices have increased sharply. That's because bison processors have had to increase the prices they are paying for slaughter-ready bison by 40% over the past four years. Fortunately the prices paid to producers are sending a signal for ranchers to build their herds.
- Our associations today are working to "grow the herd" of bison across North America by reaching out to producers who are wearying of being a part of commodity agriculture. We are conducting workshops across the country on bison production, producing new materials to assist ranchers in making a transition, reaching out to lenders to enhance their understanding of the industry so that they are prepared to finance bison operations.

We cannot address the supply shortage overnight, but we want to work with everyone in the marketplace—producers, processors, distributors, retailers and restaurateurs—as we navigate through these market challenges. Please stay with us as we work through this.

We have always considered ourselves partners with retailers and foodservice operators. We value that partnership, and invite your thoughts and suggestions as we move forward to continue building a market—and rebuild a species—based upon adherence to uncompromising principles.