



Brief History of the Beef Checkoff Program

The Beef Checkoff, an assessment, was authorized by Congress in the Beef Promotion and Research Act of 1985 and brings in around \$50 million a year. The checkoff is responsible for creating advertising campaigns such as “Beef. It’s what’s for dinner,” and providing industry-wide resources to respond to beef industry image challenges including nutritional benefits of beef and sustainability.

Unfortunately, decisions were reached within the U.S. cattle industry that resulted in strong operational ties to one Checkoff contractor, the National Cattlemen’s Beef Association (NCBA). NCBA was created when the National Live Stock and Meat Board and the National Cattlemen’s Association [merged in 1996](#) to form NCBA.

This merger established a profound link between the Beef Checkoff and this one, single beef cattle industry trade association and this disproportional relationship has proven to be incredibly detrimental to the Beef Checkoff overall. Most significantly, the bias of the Beef Checkoff towards NCBA has caused many of our Nation’s cattle producers to view their Beef Checkoff as merely a revenue source for that one trade association, fueling the perception that the Checkoff is increasingly out of touch with the majority beliefs of the nation’s cattlemen.

In the 2010s, the U.S. cattle industry had the opportunity to pursue meaningful amendments to the program after a set of grueling, multi-year meetings of the [Beef Checkoff Industry Input Group](#).

The group was established in response to a proposal to raise the beef check-off - from \$1 per head each and every time an animal is sold to \$2 per head. The group was supposed to make recommendations to Congress, since congressional action is the only way to make major changes to the program under the 1985 law that established it.

USCA [secured at least one victory](#) from these meetings, which was allowing organizations established after 1985 to be eligible to serve as contracting organizations to the checkoff. This opened eligibility to organizations such as USCA and RCALF-USA to bid against NCBA for checkoff funding.

In 2014, then-Secretary of Agriculture Thomas Vilsack proposed placing the beef checkoff under the [Commodity Promotion, Research and Information Act of 1996](#) (1996 Act). Unlike previous attempts to reform the program which would require an act of Congress, this action would simply require the Secretary of Agriculture to write a rule for a new commodity checkoff program.

This change was notable because under the 1996 Act there was no provision for the Federation of State Beef Councils to be housed at NCBA. This issue remains a key point of concern in the countryside, and USCA appreciated the leadership of USDA Secretary



of Agriculture Tom Vilsack to address this.

Unfortunately, a lack of consensus in the countryside for this change, specifically opposition from NCBA and RCALF-USA, resulted in USDA abandoning the plan. Instead, seven members of the [Beef Checkoff Enhancement Working Group](#) signed a [memorandum of understanding](#) on March 13, 2015 that stated, among other things, that all groups supported an increase to the current checkoff assessment from \$1 to \$2 per head.

USCA, RCALF-USA, and the National Farmers Union [did not sign on to the agreement](#), with USCA past president Jon Wooster noting the MOU lacked the "structural changes" the program needed.

That was the last time major changes to the program were considered. Since then, checkoff programs have come under attack by animal rights groups, who believe that the federal government has no right to promote the consumption of animal proteins, and other litigious organizations.

Of the twenty-two congressionally-authorized programs, none are more consistently under threat than the Beef Checkoff Program.

Our Recommendations

USCA believes the Beef Checkoff is strongest when U.S. producers are engaged and empowered. To that end, we recommend the following changes to the Beef Checkoff be implemented:

- ***Separation of the Federation:*** The Federation must be separated from a policy organization. The Federation should be a standalone group. Any funds allocated to the national effort should go before the beef operating committee (as it is a joint committee).
 - ***Improved Efficiencies in Enabling Change:*** A streamlined and improved mechanism for making changes to the beef checkoff must be achieved. Any changes to the Checkoff must be done via feedback from the entire cattle industry. Representation must be improved, via such efforts as an industry working group.
 - ***Direct Contracts:*** The CBB must be allowed to contract directly with vendors and organizations for services and programs. This will improve efficiencies and costs within the Checkoff.
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Full Transparency

USCA received Beef Checkoff program funding in FY 2020 for a three-year research project with Kansas State University. The "[Meat Demand Monitor](#)" provides timely research on U.S. meat demand trends. Parallel producer and consumer engagement occurs with each research report update.

The project issued its first multi-month report in July, leveraging over 10,000 survey responses spanning from February to June 2020. This period coincides with nearly the beginning of the U.S. coronavirus pandemic, providing valuable insight into consumer purchasing behaviors during a national health crisis. [Learn more and read the report HERE.](#)

This three-year project was funded by the Beef Checkoff program for \$359,126, with the Pork Checkoff contributing an additional \$300,000. USCA has yet to submit any invoices for administrative duties of overseeing the contract, but is authorized to be reimbursed up to \$18,000 over three years for implementation of the project.

Further, USCA prepared and submitted an FY 2021 Authorization Request for \$72,000 to carry out a proposed research project with [Dr. Harry Kaiser](#) to illustrate the direct benefits of activities carried out by the Cattlemen's Beef Board not only for beef producers and importers, but also for beef packers and retailers. The proposal was not funded.