

Meat Industry **INSIGHTS** Newsletter Weekly **FLASH**

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Hard Core Industry News Without the Fat

Silicon Valley Imitation Meat Startup Raises \$75 Million

August 2, 2017 (Reuters) - Impossible Foods, a maker of plant-based burgers engineered to taste like meat, has secured \$75 million of funding, the Silicon Valley-based company said.

Singapore investment firm Temasek led the company's fifth funding round, announced on Tuesday, which brought the total raised since its founding to \$257 million. Open Philanthropy Project, Bill Gates, Khosla Ventures and Horizon Ventures also contributed to the round.

A handful of startups and established food processing companies are developing meat alternatives to meet growing demand. Impossible Foods makes burger patties primarily from wheat and potato protein and coconut fat, which are served in 40 restaurants, primarily in California, Texas and New York.

The Redwood City-based company will shift most of its production from a facility in Rutgers, New Jersey to Oakland, California this fall, Chief Operating Officer David Lee said. ■

Arby's Rides Meat Wagon

August 2, 2017 (Brand Channel) - Arby's has gained uncommon momentum these days in a quick-serve-restaurant sector where many of its contemporaries are struggling badly. Leveraging the strategy of a new CEO and new CMO, Arby's had its best year ever in 2016, with \$3.7 billion in sales, up 20% from 2013. New initiatives include the Triple Thick Brown Sugar Bacon BLT, available for a limited time only at Arby's 3,300 restaurants nationwide.

And behind the four-year leadership of Paul Brown, the CEO, and Rob Lynch, Chief Marketing Officer Arby's is stepping on the gas this year with new initiatives such as its Triple Thick Brown Sugar Bacon BLT, available for a limited time only at Arby's 3,300 restaurants nationwide.

Brown told Business Insider that he saw McDonald's as the New York Yankees of fast food and Arby's as the Oakland A's, the scrappy team from over a decade ago whose data-intensive, counter-intuitive strategy was made iconic in Moneyball.

"So when you look at it that way, you've got to do things differently," Brown told the publication. "We had to one, come up with a way of talking about ourselves in a voice that actually stood out, but we also had to be more creative about all the channels that you could use to get the message out."

As Business Insider puts it, Arby's underwent some "Moneyball" moves that included more than 20 new menu items and revamped restaurant kitchens. Last year, for instance, Arby's celebrated deer-hunting season by offering venison sandwiches in prime deer-hunting communities. ■



Friday Direct Cattle Trade Limited to Clean-Up

August 4, 2017 (Brownfield Ag News) - Chicago Mercantile Exchange live cattle futures were mostly lower on profit taking, beef demand uncertainties, and spread trade, while the pit waited to see how much direct cash business was left to be done. The answer, apparently, was not all that much. August was the only contract in the black, up \$.22 at \$115.45, while more active October was down \$.372 at \$114.10.

Feeder cattle were lower on the firm corn, profit taking, and spillover from the live pit. August was \$.70 lower at \$149.95 and September was down \$.35 at \$150.85.

Direct cash cattle markets were generally pretty quiet, aside from some light business at \$117.50 to \$118 on the live basis in Texas and \$187 to \$188 dressed in Nebraska. What was left on the showlist was priced at \$120 live and \$190 to \$192 dressed. DTN says some of the cattle purchased were for delivery as early as Saturday or next Monday, so packers may be short bought again in this coming week.

Boxed beef closed lower on light to moderate demand and offerings. Choice was down \$1.55 at \$203.61 and Select was \$.47 lower at \$197.31. The estimated cattle slaughter was 117,000 head, an increase of 2,000 on the week and 11,000 on the year.

At the Farmers and Ranchers Livestock Commission feeder cattle auction in Kansas Friday, feeder steers were mostly \$3 to \$5 higher with 950 to 1,000 pounders firm to \$1 higher. Heifers were uneven, with 550 to 750 pounders firm, including a few \$1 to \$2 higher, and heifers weighing more than 750 pounds were weak to \$4 lower. The USDA says there were several consignment loads with moderate to excessive flesh. Trade was active with good demand as many cattle were just off of pastures and rangelands. 92% of the run weighed more than 600 pounds and 66% of the offering were steers. Medium and Large 1 800 to 900 pound feeder steers sold at \$147 to \$155 and 900 to 1,000 pounders brought \$140 to \$149. Medium and Large 1 feeder heifers weighing 600 to 700 pounds ranged from \$148 to \$157 and 700 to 800 pound heifers were reported at \$140 to \$147.

The USDA says hay prices in Iowa this week were mostly steady, but with some weakness for large rounds. Dry weather should allow for good progress on the third cutting. Good quality large squares of alfalfa sold at \$160 to \$180. Good small squares of alfalfa and grass brought \$140 to \$150, with large squares at \$125 to \$140 and large rounds at \$90 to \$100. In Missouri, hay movement was light with steady prices and light demand for moderate supplies. Supreme quality alfalfa ranged from \$170 to \$220 with premium at \$150 to \$180 and good at \$120 to \$160. Good quality mixed grass hay sold at \$75 to \$100. Nebraska alfalfa and grass hay sales were steady, with ground and delivered hay \$5 higher and dehydrated alfalfa pellets steady to \$5 higher. The USDA says the market leveled off during the week as possible buyers decide on potential needs for this fall and winter. In the east/central portion of the state, premium large squares of alfalfa were reported at \$180 with good quality at \$140 to \$150 and fair at \$105 to \$110. Good large rounds ranged from \$80 to \$85 with a few at \$95. Premium large rounds of alfalfa and orchard grass were pegged at \$120. 17% protein dehydrated alfalfa pellets sold at \$185 to \$210. In the Platte Valley, good large rounds of alfalfa sold at \$80 to \$85 with ground and delivered alfalfa at \$110 to \$115. 17% protein dehydrated alfalfa pellets brought \$190.

Lean hog futures were higher on oversold signals and contracts' discount to the cash index. August was up \$1.25 at \$83.22 and October was \$1.27 higher at \$66.77.

Cash hogs were mostly steady to lower. Buyers were able to extend the leverage they held for most of the week, with Saturday's kill expected to be 76,000 head. That'd put the weekly slaughter at 2.25 million head, up 50,000 on the year. There's some uncertainty about the actual pace of expansion and how it matches up to USDA projections, but market ready numbers are increasing.

Iowa/Southern Minnesota direct barrows and gilts closed \$.60 lower at \$73 to \$82 for a weighted average of \$80.61 and the Western Cornbelt was down \$.34 at \$73 to \$82 with an average of \$80.56, but national direct business was \$.32 higher at \$73 to \$82 for an average of \$79.82. Butcher hogs at the Midwest cash markets were steady at \$60. Missouri direct butchers were steady at \$75 on light to moderate supply and demand. Sows were steady at \$55 to \$70. Illinois direct sows were steady at \$62 to \$77 with very good demand for light to moderate offerings. Barrows and gilts were steady at \$48 to \$56 on light to moderate demand for moderate offerings. Boars ranged from \$10 to \$38.

Pork closed \$.98 lower at \$95.77. Ribs and butts were up, all other primals were weak to lower. The estimated hog slaughter was 422,000 head, down 10,000 on the week and unchanged on the year.

The USDA reports early weaned pigs were \$1 lower and all feeder pigs were \$2 lower. The USDA says demand was light to moderate for moderate offerings and 49% of the week's receipts were formula receipts. The total composite formula range for early weaned pigs was \$29.53 to \$44 with a weighted average of \$38.25 and the total composite cash range was \$11.50 to \$30 with an average of \$19.04 for an all early weaned average of \$28.93. The total composite cash range for feeder pigs was \$30 to \$51 with a weighted average of \$45.71. ■

Ready For this One? U.S. Pets Are Responsible For 30% of the Environmental Impact of Meat.

August 4, 2017 (<http://www.marketwatch.com>) - Guess the environmental lobby has done its homework -- Or is grasping for new ways to attack meat.

A new study says dogs and cats take a toll on the environment each year that's roughly equivalent to a year's worth of driving by 13.6 million cars, a researcher at the University of California at Los Angeles found. The study was published Wednesday in the journal PLOS ONE.

UCLA geography professor Gary Okin found that the country's 163 million cats and dogs are "responsible for 25% to 30% of the environmental impact of meat consumption in the United States," the university announced. That adds up to some 64 million tons of carbon dioxide a year. Okin compared how much meat humans eat versus pets, then analyzed the environmental impact of each.

If America's pets were their own country, their meat consumption would rank fifth in the world behind only Russia, Brazil, the United States and China, Okin concluded. They're also responsible for generating 5.1 million pounds of feces per year, which is roughly equivalent to the amount of garbage produced by all the humans in Massachusetts, the study found.

I guess it's time to turn in your pet. ■

JBS, World's Largest Meat Company, Mired in Multiple Corruption Scandals in Brazil

August 3, 2017 (Community Radio for Northern Colorado) - It has been a rough few months for the world's largest meat company.

Known for its rapid expansion across the globe, Brazil-based meatpacking giant JBS has been embroiled in scandal for much of 2017. The company is so large it is difficult to avoid for those who eat meat. As of 2014, JBS's U.S. subsidiary held a 22 percent market-share in U.S. beef processing and an 18 percent market-share in poultry processing.

While most of the company's troubles have been isolated to their home country of Brazil, a recent multi-billion dollar fine has JBS officials selling assets around the world, signaling a change for a company that just two years ago boasted its "aggressive growth strategy." The company's U.S. subsidiary, Colorado-based JBS USA, is selling its cattle feedlot business.

In March, JBS CEO Wesley Batista jumped on a routine conference call with investors. After listing the company's first quarter financial figures, he addressed the elephant in the room.

"Moving to our beef business in South America, primarily Brazil," Batista tells the investors. "You all know that, you know, we, uh, we had a problem in March."

That problem came in the form of a sting conducted by Brazilian law enforcement in an operation called "Carne Fraca," which translates to Weak Flesh. Federal agents raided some of Brazil's largest meatpackers, including JBS. They accused processors big and small of bribing government meat inspectors to ignore food safety problems. The company denied any wrongdoing. The investigation is ongoing.

Countries around the world -- including the U.S. -- responded by temporarily closing off imports of Brazilian beef. American inspectors began testing every shipment of Brazilian beef into the U.S. and rejected 11 percent of products shipped. That prompted U.S. Department of Agriculture Secretary Sonny Perdue in June to halt all imports of fresh beef from Brazil. JBS saw the impact right away in Brazil, Batista told investors.

"We reduced volume, costs went up and we incurred a lot of expenses due to this problem," Batista said on the investor call.

That was just the beginning of JBS's year of controversy. Another corruption probe in Brazil alleges the company received suspect loans from the National Bank for Economic and Social Development -- Brazil's federal bank, which enabled JBS to expand rapidly worldwide over the last decade. Authorities say the bank played favorites with JBS, giving the company favorable loan terms starting in June 2007 to acquire other meat companies around the world. That same year, JBS purchased beef and pork processor Swift Foods, entering the U.S. market for the first time.

"They were expanding because they had unlimited access to funds," says Tatiana Bautzer, a business reporter for Reuters based in São Paulo.

The company's troubles did not stop there. Secretly recorded tapes surfaced in May of Brazil's president, Michel Temer, allegedly discussing bribing a former legislator. The tapes were recorded by JBS chairman Joesley Batista and came to light when he and his brother, Wesley Batista, signed a leniency agreement

with federal prosecutors and agreed to have JBS's holding company pay a \$3.2 billion fine. The brothers were staring down possible bribery charges as a part of Brazil's multi-year corruption investigation known as Operation Car Wash.

In the wake of the scandals, Joesley Batista stepped down as the company's chairman, while Wesley stayed on as CEO. A corporate restructuring and potential public offering in the U.S. was put on pause. The company also began selling some of its assets: a large Brazilian dairy company, a poultry processor in Europe and all of its cattle feedlots in the U.S. operated under Five Rivers Cattle Feeding. Five Rivers has enough feedlots to hold nearly 1 million head of cattle, and has about 750 employees spread across Colorado, Kansas, Oklahoma, Texas, Arizona and Idaho.

Bautzer says the sale is not surprising, given the fine the company has to pay and the halt to its free flow of funds.

"I think they will try to preserve JBS as much as they can at the current size," Bautzer says. "It remains to be seen whether the company will seriously downsize. I think it will depend on how they're able to finance themselves with the banks, whether the banks will continue to finance them short-term and long-term."

JBS's American subsidiary operates poultry, pork and beef processing plants across the country. None of its U.S. processing plants have been offered for sale, but a report by Brazilian newspaper O Estado de S. Paulo notes that its competitor Cargill is interested in buying JBS's American poultry brand, Pilgrim's Pride.

Any changes JBS makes to how it does business will ripple through the global food system. Many American ranchers sell their cattle to feedlots or slaughterhouses owned and operated JBS USA. At least one U.S. rancher group -- the Ranchers-Cattlemen Action Legal Fund, or, R-CALF -- has called for an investigation of JBS USA.

"Here we have a company whose business model includes bribery and other corrupt practices," says Bill Bullard, R-CALF's CEO and a former Montana rancher. "We believe that it's highly possible that this company is deploying this same corrupt business model here in the United States of America."

There is no evidence of that and the company says its decisions are strategic. JBS USA spokesman Cameron Bruett says the company chose to sell its cattle feeding business "to focus more on processing and food production," and that the move mirrors what other similarly sized players in meatpacking have done.

"These strategic divestitures allow for a more profitable company, and allow us to one day take our company public," Bruett says.

Ranching and meat industry publications are covering every twist and turn in the JBS saga. While some ranchers are closely monitoring the status of their industry's biggest player, others are content to wait and see.

"Concentration doesn't concern me," says Tracy Brunner, a rancher in Ramona, Kansas, and the outgoing president of the National Cattlemen's Beef Association. "Because I know that the beef industry is built on opportunity." ■

Vegan Protesters Force California Butcher to Hang Animal Rights Sign

August 03, 2017 (www.cattlenetwork.com) - A California butcher shop has caved to the demands of a vegan, animal rights group to hang a sign on the storefront that says animals' have the right to live.

The animal rights group, Direct Action Everywhere, held protests in front of the Local Butcher Shop in Berkeley, Calif., for four months. The Washington Post reports that protesters would be "dripping with fake blood, tightly bound in plastic wrap as if they were cuts of meat. Singing, shouting, lecturing customers."

The vegan protesters sent a list of demands to the butcher shop, including that the shop hang a sign in their window. The sign says "Attention: Animals lives are their right. Killing them is violent and unjust, no matter how it's done."

Direct Action Everywhere has touted the coup as a "victory" on the groups Facebook page where it shares a video of "A famous butcher shop in Berkeley is now warning its customers that meat is violence!"

The Local Butcher Shop began in 2011, buying whole animals to butcher from local farms and is owned by the husband and wife team of Aaron and Monica Rocchino.

"To be threatened and forced to abide by their beliefs just makes me sad," Monica Rocchino told The Guardian. "Their tactics are really extremist ... This is ethical extortion."

Products sold by the butcher shop include: deli meats, sausage, stews, dog food and a sandwich of the day. Classes are held at the shop regularly to talk about various butchering techniques like sausage making or half hog butchery demos.

Despite The Local Butcher Shop meeting some of the demands of Direct Action Everywhere, the animal rights activists have started an online petition to stop butchers in Berkley from using the term "humane" to describe their meat.

The petition is asking for 200 signatures and as of 10 am CST on Aug. 3 there are 121 signatures. People have signed the petition from outside the Berkley area including locations in Russia, Denmark, Germany and

Malaysia.

In the petition Direct Action Everywhere organizer and investigator Matt Johnson writes, "This groundbreaking victory is the first of DxE's "Facing the Truth" initiative, which empowers us, as individuals and communities, to unveil the long-suppressed truth of animal exploitation and demand transparency and integrity in our food system. It paves the way for additional animal-friendly progress, including an end goal of a meat-free Berkeley by 2025."

Direct Action Everywhere believes that farms and butcher shops cannot claim to be "humane" if it results in the death of an animal. The animal rights activists plan to deliver the petition to Jesse Arreguin, the mayor of Berkeley.

Arreguin and the city of Berkeley have been on the side of animal rights activists in the past few months and years. The city council of Berkeley recently banned the sale of fur in April, becoming the second city in the nation to do so. A ban on declawing pets was put in place in 2009, as well.

Because of these animal rights victories, the city of Berkeley was presented the Compassionate City Award by People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals (PETA) Foundation.

"Berkeley has a history of being at the forefront in fighting for the welfare of all animals," Arreguin told The Daily Californian. "We welcome more ideas of legislation."

A number of people have come to the defense of The Local Butcher Shop on social media.

"Great local business! Don't give in to the extortion tactics of insane people!," Kathy Kayhour says on Facebook.

Also on Facebook, a commenter named John Smith says, "Sad to see that you are suffering from the animal nazis harassment. I'm also sad to see you fold to their demands, but I do understand. Maybe some heavy handed security would have been a better option. These kids need a spanking it seems." ■

Is it "Unnatural" For Ground Beef to Be Made of Meat From More than One Animal?

(Meat MythCrushers) - According to AMI's Myth Crushers, the answer is "Not true."

To understand why, one must understand how ground beef is made and the food safety strategies that are used.

Just like orange juice might come from multiple orange trees, a jar of apple sauce might contain apples from numerous trees or a gallon of milk might come from more than one cow, your ground beef might come from multiple cattle.

When a large carcass is cut into steaks and roasts, small pieces called trimmings result. Trimmings are simply the pieces that are trimmed from larger cuts and look like the beef stew meat you might find in your grocer's case. These are perfectly wholesome and nutritious cuts of beef, but they are smaller than a normal cut and ideal for grinding. To make the most of the trimmings, they are ground together in certain fat to lean to fat proportions to make ground beef in formulations like 80 percent lean/20 percent fat or 90 percent lean/10 percent fat.

Half of all the beef consumed in North America is consumed as ground beef. It tends to be one of the more economical beef options in the meat case and gives consumers a wide variety of meat options.

Dig deeper... Like all beef, beef trimmings are produced under federal inspection. When trimmings are ground together, this grinding is also done under federal inspection. Many countries have established sampling programs to verify the safety of these products. In the case of the United States, the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) samples ground beef and the trimmings for E. coli O157:H7 as well as other Shiga toxin-producing E. coli 1 and processors run their own tests for E. coli and other bacteria as part of standard food safety management programs.

Grinding safe and inspected trimmings together results in a safe product. A single, whole muscle cut like a chuck roast can also be ground into a safe ground beef product. The mere fact that one comes from a larger piece and another comes from smaller pieces, does not impact food safety or quality of the ground beef. ■

Sanderson Farms Continues Social Media "Truth-Telling" Campaign. And it Works!

August 2, 2017 (<http://www.perishablenews.com>) - Last August, Sanderson Farms made the bold decision to launch a consumer education campaign focused on revealing prevalent falsehoods and half-truths within

poultry marketing. The company's newly released television and radio advertisements, "Old MacGimmick," have evolved from these efforts and continue the same truth-telling mission.

"At Sanderson Farms, we have made it our responsibility to shine a light on misleading marketing tactics and labeling," said Joe F. Sanderson, Jr., CEO and chairman of the board for Sanderson Farms. "Rather than acquiescing to trending scare tactics and socially driven paranoia, Sanderson Farms has chosen to address the issues using hard science. While there may have been an easier route to take, we have chosen to continue this course of action for the benefit of our customers."

One main goal of the campaign has been to inform consumers about the benefits of judicious antibiotic use in poultry, such as improved animal welfare, environmental sustainability, and food safety.

Although the original campaign has faced some pressure from competitors, activist groups, and the media, the general public has shown great support and appreciation for Sanderson Farms' transparent and honest approach. Since the effort began last year, Sanderson Farms has seen:

- 125.7% increase in Facebook followers
- 39.5M Facebook video views
- 96K Facebook post shares

"Most Americans have simply lost touch with the farm and how agriculture operates, allowing misinformation to run rampant about where our food really comes from," said Hilary Burroughs, Director of Marketing for Sanderson Farms. "We decided to use a myth-busting approach to the campaign as a means of dispelling some of the most common misconceptions around antibiotics, hormones, steroids and animal welfare issues."

In conjunction with the new ads, Sanderson Farms has launched a completely updated consumer website full of educational resources. SandersonFarms.com is home to information about the company's animal welfare standards, sustainable business practices, and 100% natural chicken products. Consumers can find answers to frequently asked questions, delicious recipes, and a behind-the-scenes look at how Sanderson Farms chickens are raised. ■

Closing Grain and Livestock Futures: August 4, 2017

(Brownfield Ag News) - The numbers are:

- Sep. corn closed at \$3.66 and 1/2, up 3 cents
- Aug. soybeans closed at \$9.49 and 1/4, down 1 and 1/4 cents
- Aug. soybean meal closed at \$303.50, down \$2.80
- Aug. soybean oil closed at 33.60, up 22 points
- Sep. wheat closed at \$4.54 and 3/4, down 3 cents
- Aug. live cattle closed at \$115.45, up 22 cents
- Aug. lean hogs closed at \$83.22, up \$1.25
- Sep. crude oil closed at \$49.58, up 55 cents
- Dec. cotton closed at 70.56, up 40 points
- Sep. rice closed at \$12.33, down 5 and 1/2 cents
- Aug. Class III milk closed at \$16.33, down 9 cents
- Aug. gold closed at \$1,258.30, down \$9.50
- Dow Jones Industrial Average closed at 22,092.81, up 66.71 points ■

Demand for Organic Beef Meat to Remain High in Developed Regions During 2017-2027

August 3, 2017 (perishablenews.com) - Going forward, rearing cattle on certified organic fodders is turning out to be more profitable than conventional practices. Growing concerns of consumers over food safety has propelled the demand for organic foods, and has incidentally affected the global beef production. Particularly in developed markets, the demand for organic beef meat is gaining traction pertaining to the rising confidence of consumers towards organic beef over regular beef. The main difference between these options lies in the fodder fed to the cattle, at which point organic fodder is healthier and nutritious than regular cattle feed.

In 2017, over 1.5 million metric tonnes of organic beef meat is anticipated to be consumed across the globe. Future Market Insights' recent study on global organic beef meat market projects that by the end of

this year, the global market will be valued a little over US\$ 8.8 Bn. Large retail chains such as Whole Foods are already boosting the presence of organic agricultural produce in their store shelves, and this trend is also expected to promote the availability of organic beef meat. TESCO, a prominent retail chain in the UK, is following this path by offering organic beef in various processed formats, and under its own label.

The report projects that by the end of 2027, the value of global market for organic beef meat will get doubled, surpassing US\$ 16.4 Bn and reflecting a healthy CAGR of 6.4%. Higher on-shelf availability of organic beef meat products in countries such as the UK vindicates the report's key finding that observes Western Europe as a leading region in the global market. The report anticipates that through 2027, around 30% of organic beef meat consumed in the world will be concentrated in Western Europe.

Developed Markets Lucrative for Sales of Organic Beef Meat

Highlights from the report's regional analysis on the global organic beef meat market indicate North America and Western Europe as dominant regions. Beef is a primary source of food for consumers across these developed regions. Moreover, consumers in developed countries such as the US and Canada are more aware about organic certified foods, and how they are better than conventional food products. Throughout the forecast period, over two-fifth of organic beef meat sold in the global market will be accounted by consumers in the US and Canada.

With North America at the forefront, the global organic beef meat market is also expected to witness considerable contribution from Western European countries. The organic beef meat market in Western Europe is pegged to reach nearly US\$ 5 Bn in value towards the end of 2027. On the other hand, the demand for organic beef meat products will lose traction in the Asia-Pacific excluding Japan (APEJ) region. A remarkable highlight of these regional projections is that the Middle East & Africa (MEA) region, which exhibits a higher contribution to global beef consumption, will be accounting for not more than 2% share of global organic beef meat revenues throughout the forecast period.

Preview Analysis on Global Organic Beef Meat Market Segmentation By Type - Fresh Meat, Processed Meat (Ground Beef, Steak Beef, Chucks, Patty, Others); By Sales - Direct Sales, Indirect Sales (Modern Trade, Convenience Stores, Online Retailers, Independent Retailers, Others): <http://www.futuremarketinsights.com/reports/organic-beef-meat-market>

Sales of Processed Organic Beef Meat to Gain Traction

The report has recorded the market's growth across two sales channels, direct and indirect. In 2017, indirect sales of organic beef meat is projected to account for more than 60% share on global market revenues, and this contribution is slated to witness a significant boost towards the end of forecast period. Across both sales channels, the report has witnessed a considerable rise in demand for processed organic beef meat. By the end of 2017, global sales of fresh organic beef meat will be raking revenues just over US\$ 2.1 Bn, whereas organic beef meat in processed format will dominate with more than 75% revenue share. Towards the latter half of the forecast period, the global demand for processed organic beef meat will further gain traction, bringing in revenues worth over US\$ 12.8 Bn. ■

Arkansas Farmers Aim to Take the Mystery Out of Meat

August 3, 2017 (perishablenews.com) - A group of livestock farmers in Arkansas, supported by Heifer USA, is using cutting-edge technology to let you know where your dinner comes from. The small-scale, forward-thinking suppliers of Grass Roots Farmers' Cooperative are the first in the United States to use blockchain technology to trace their products from farm to fork, with the aim of giving consumers more confidence in the origin and quality of the meat they buy.

Already a mainstay in the financial sector, blockchain technology allows for public verification of information in the food chain. Shoppers and diners will be able to scan QR codes on Grass Roots products to learn where the meat came from and how the animals were raised. The "digital history" of the meat will also include stories of the people -- from farmer to butcher -- who contributed in crafting the final product.

"Americans have an increasing interest in better understanding what they're eating. According to the 2016 Label Insight Study, 83 percent of consumers want more information about what's in their food, and I totally believe it," said Cody Hopkins, Grass Roots general manager and founding member. "When I learned about this technology, I thought 'this is the solution.' It's the perfect way for Grass Roots to offer folks total transparency. (UK-based technology company) Provenance has developed a platform that levels the playing field for small-scale farmers and puts information directly in consumers' hands."

Grass Roots embraced technology as a way to boost food quality and customer service. Heifer USA's Advisory Board Chair, Pierre Ferrari, commented, "Our farmers are innovative, always looking for ways to incorporate the latest technology that ultimately create real value to the consumer. Partnering with Provenance and the Golden Gate Meat Company is another example of how proactive they are in wanting

their customers to know where their food originates. It's only a matter of time before this becomes 'best practice' throughout the industry."

San Francisco-based Golden Gate Meat Company, a purveyor of Grass Roots products, will debut the first trial of this technology today, giving customers the opportunity to use these advanced tools in stores. Additionally, Grass Roots meats are available for purchase online and can be found in restaurants and retailers across the country. ■

Survey: Corn Crop Down 10%, Soybean Crop 2% Lower

August 3, 2017 - A Farm Futures survey of U.S. farmers shows this year's corn production could fall ten percent compared to the record crop of 2016, due to lower yields and acreage.

Soybean production could be off two percent, with a big increase in acreage offsetting a nine percent drop in yields, according to the survey.

The average corn yield came in at 164 bushels per acre with corn acres down about four percent, which equates to a total crop of 13.6 billion bushels.

The survey's average soybean yield was 48 bushels per acre. Combined with a seven percent increase in acreage, the total soybean crop is estimated to be 4.2 billion bushels.

Farm Futures market analyst Bryce Knorr said lower corn production could be enough to stabilize that market, and perhaps produce rallies to move grain out of farmers' hands after harvest.

On soybeans, Knorr says a 4.2 billion bushel crop could tighten carryout modestly, but ending stocks might still run around 400 million bushels for the 2017 crop. He says that could make it hard to rally soybeans without a weather threat in South America. ■

Tyson Restructures Executive Roles

August 3, 2017 meatpoultry.com - Two executives will depart Tyson Foods Inc. as part of a company restructuring announced Aug. 2. Monica McGurk, chief growth officer, and Andy Callahan, president, North American Foodservice & International, will be leaving the company.

The changes come less than six months after the company announced a new senior leadership team in February, following Hayes' appointment on Dec. 31, 2016. At the time, the company said the enhanced structure was created to focus on consumers, customers, technology and sustainability, and to align management to Tyson Foods' purpose and strategy.

The new structure is designed around Tyson Foods' Beef, Pork, Chicken and Prepared Foods segments. Group presidents have been tapped to lead the segments end-to-end, with responsibility for growth strategy, execution and developing teams across product categories and customer channels. Sally Grimes will become group president of Prepared Foods, Doug Ramsey has been named group president of Poultry, and Noel White has been selected as group president of Fresh Meats (Beef and Pork) & International. Each will report to Tom Hayes, president and CEO of Tyson.

"A dynamic market demands we become more agile while focusing on consumers, customers and the businesses that deliver our revenue and profit," Hayes said. "This simple design creates individual responsibility for the performance of our segments to enable faster, better, decisions."

Hayes' other direct reports will continue to include Scott Rouse, chief customer officer; Mary Oleksiuk, chief human resources officer; Scott Spradley, chief technology officer; David Van Bebber, general counsel; Dennis Leatherby, CFO; and Justin Whitmore, chief sustainability officer. George Chappelle, currently chief integration officer, will continue to lead the integration of the recently acquired AdvancePierre Foods business, then transition to the role of COO of the Prepared Foods segment, reporting to Grimes. ■

"Weight Improvement, Satisfaction and Energy" Study Shows that Lean Beef Can Help People Lose Weight

July 17, 2017 - (www.beefboard.org) - New research published in Obesity Science & Practice shows that lean beef, as part of a healthy and higher-protein diet, can help people lose weight while maintaining muscle and a healthy heart.

"The Beef WISE Study: Beef's Role in Weight Improvement, Satisfaction, and Energy," conducted at the

University of Colorado Anschutz Health and Wellness Center with a research grant from the beef checkoff, adds to the growing body of evidence demonstrating lean beef can contribute to a healthy weight loss diet.

While the popularity of higher-protein diets has grown considerably, there is often guidance telling people to limit red meat as a protein source. However, few studies have compared different high-quality protein sources to understand their effectiveness in a weight loss or maintenance diet. Dr. Drew Sayer, PhD, and his colleagues at the Anschutz Health and Wellness Center, sought to understand the effectiveness of lean beef compared to other protein sources on measures of health — such as weight loss and muscle mass maintenance — in a higher-protein diet, as well as the impact on cardiovascular disease risk factors.

Lean beef as effective as other proteins for weight loss potential

The Beef WISE Study included 99 overweight or obese adults in a comprehensive weight management program called State of Slim. For 16 weeks, they emphasized behavioral strategies to make lasting healthful changes in diet and physical activity to promote optimal health and wellness.

In addition to participating in regular moderate-intensity exercise, study participants were separated into two groups that followed the higher-protein diet. One group consumed four or more servings of lean beef each week and the other group was restricted from eating red meat. Subjects in both groups lost equal amounts of body weight and fat mass while preserving muscle.

“A key finding of this study is that 90 to 95 percent of the weight lost came from fat, not muscle,” said Dr. Sayer. “This shows that lean beef doesn’t have to be restricted in a higher-protein diet and is just as effective as other protein choices in supporting healthy weight loss and leaner bodies.”

Growing evidence on lean beef and heart health

All study participants, including those who consumed lean beef four or more times a week as part of the healthy, higher-protein diet in combination with exercise, showed improvements in their total and LDL cholesterol and blood pressure metrics, indicating lean beef did not negatively affect their heart health.

The Beef WISE Study contributes to the growing body of research demonstrating the role of lean beef in heart-healthy diets and strong bodies. This includes a study called BOLD (Beef in an Optimal Lean Diet), which demonstrated that adding lean beef to the well-established Dietary Approaches to Stop Hypertension (DASH) diet lowered heart disease risk by reducing levels of total and LDL cholesterol. (2)

Protein and weight loss

A substantial body of evidence shows the nutrients in beef, such as high-quality protein, can help satisfy hunger and maintain a healthy weight, build and maintain muscle, and fuel a healthy and active lifestyle. (3), (4), (5), (6) Beef is an important source of nutrients, including iron, zinc and B-vitamins, for optimal health.

“Losing weight is not easy. Neither is maintaining a healthy weight, particularly as we age. We know people succeed most often when they make small changes they can stick with,” said Shalene McNeill, PhD, RD, Executive Director of the Human Nutrition Research Program at National Cattlemen’s Beef Association, a contractor to the beef checkoff. “This study is great news for people who enjoy beef, but might have been told to avoid it while following weight loss diets. It underscores, once again, lean beef can be part of a healthy, higher-protein diet for weight loss.”

People can incorporate 3- to 4-ounce servings of lean beef, supplying about 30 grams of protein, in simple recipes, such as Grilled Southwestern Steak, Classic Beef Kabobs, Hearty Steak and Bean Chili and Beef, Mango & Barley Salad. ■

News Flash: There Never Were Antibiotics In Your Damn Meat!

July 30, 2017 - (Twitter ndfarmerswife) - Maybe the title is a little aggressive. I tried finding a way to get the point across kindly. But, it sure “grinds my gears” when marketing campaigns use hippy language to convince the general public that they have found a NEW idea (that has been a regulation for quite some time). Antibiotic Free! Like the idea of not allowing humans to consume antibiotics given to animals, through their meat or other products, wasn’t something people already thought of.

A brief history of Antibiotics

In 1928 Alexander Fleming accidentally made penicillin because he left out some bacteria in a dish near an open window over night (long story short). Take a minute for that to sink in. This biologist in Europe found a way to use a fungus that grow on bacteria and turn it into the cure. People went nuts, and rightfully so! Before the discovery, a bacterial infection was a near death sentence.

Fast forward to 1951, the Federal Drug Administration (FDA), approves the first antibiotic to be used in

animals. Granted the FDA noted that the antibiotic helped growth in certain livestock, but that's probably partially because animals were able to stay healthy and not fight off bacterial infections alone.

How do I know the animal product I am consuming doesn't have any residual antibiotics?

That is the question every consumer should ask before they buy antibiotic free anything. When using antibiotics became widespread, the FDA decided they needed to make sure people were not consuming any antibiotic that was given to the animal. Each antibiotic has a given withdrawal period for each animal. Withdrawal allows levels of antibiotics to significantly decrease to levels of maybe a trace if any. Let's take dairy cattle and some antibiotics they may receive:

- Antibiotic: Albon Boluses (Pfizer). Medication should be administered orally. Animals should receive initial dose of 25mg per lb BW followed by subsequent daily doses of 12.5 mg per lb of BW. Meat withdrawal is 7 days. Milk Withdrawal is 60 hours.
- Antibiotic: Bactracillin G (Aspen). Medication should be administered intramuscularly. Inject 1-2 mL per 100 lbs BW twice a day. Meat withdrawal is 30 days (some research indicated 14 days). Milk Withdrawal is 7 days.

Each of these antibiotics treats different things. Albon Boluses treats organisms related to E.coli-Salmonella and Bactracillin G is a form of penicillin, and it treats gram positive bacteria such as bacterial pneumonia. People, far above my pay grade, have studied this stuff for years! People that are smarter than the common consumer in the grocery looking at different packages for their "healthiness" #sorrynotsorry

Also, farmers and ranchers don't give out antibiotics until it's absolutely necessary. Consider the above example; if a cow had to be given an antibiotic for pneumonia, the dairy farmer would have to milk that one cow separately and dispose of her milk for 14, additional, milking cycles after her last treatment. Economically, you can't just give out antibiotics whenever if you're trying to sustain a business.

What about all those times I read about people finding antibiotics in their MILK!?

First, you should unfollow/unfriend whichever "friend" you have posting this garbage on Facebook/Twitter. No company will accept animal products that contain antibiotics. They will discard the entire shipment if antibiotics are found. Let me say it a little louder for the people in the back; YOUR ANIMAL PRODUCTS DON'T HAVE ANTIBIOTICS IN THEM!

According to a 2011 study published by the USDA Food Safety Inspection Service, there were 1,632 positive samples of meat tested from 211,733 total samples. To put that into a percentage, .77%. Worried that the .77% could in your freezer? It won't be. "When a violation is found with in-plant rapid testing, samples are sent for laboratory confirmation including identifying and determining the level of the chemical(s) present. Carcasses from samples that come back positive are condemned and do not enter the food chain." – Jeannine P. Schwehofer, Michigan State University Extension

Don't believe me? I don't blame you. I could easily be one more person too good at marketing. But who will you believe? How about the people that actually care for these animals and their welfare like the International Dairy Foods Association? ■

Mann Packing Breaks Ground On New Gonzales, CA Processing Facility

August 3, 2017 - Mann Packing, an industry leading supplier of premium fresh vegetables, broke ground on its new processing facility in Gonzales, California. The groundbreaking ceremony featured company representatives, local government officials and business leaders.

Headquartered in Salinas, California, Mann's selected the City of Gonzales for its 130,000 square foot expansion project because of its convenient location and zoned industrial area. The company has a further land base at the same location to accommodate future expansions. 250 people will be employed at the new facility.

Sixty-five percent of the company's manufacturing volume will relocate from Salinas to the Gonzales facility. Mann's location at 1250 Hansen Street in Salinas will continue to process fresh-cut vegetables, but will mainly serve as the company's central warehouse, cooling and shipping facility.

Construction of the facility is targeted for completion in early 2018, with production beginning in spring. The facility was designed with the goal of achieving electric sustainability and will utilize a windmill turbine to supply energy for heating and cooling.

"We are proud to announce our new home in Gonzales and excited to be part of this thriving business community," said Lorri Koster, chairman & CEO at Mann's. "This project represents the beginning of a partnership and a culmination of years of planning to create a facility which will serve as an anchor for the company's fresh processing needs," she added. ■

The Importance of Grass-Fed Beef in the Newly Popular Paleo Diet. Let Your Customers Know.

August 3, 2017 (paleoleap.com) - Paleo is big on meat, but not just any meat. Take a look at what "grass-fed" actually means (it's not the same thing as organic!), why it's nutritionally superior, and what you can do about the cost.

What does Grass-Fed Mean?

Before getting into the benefits of grass-fed meat, it's important to pin down what we're talking about. "Grass-fed" means exactly what it sounds like: the cow ate grass (and sometimes other grasslike things, like alfalfa – other stuff that you would naturally find in a field and that the cow would naturally eat).

This sounds like a completely ridiculous label: don't all cows eat grass? What else would a cow eat?

Actually, most cows raised in the US start their lives eating grass, but when it comes time to fatten them up for slaughter, they're moved to barns where they live inside and eat grains, not grass. The vast majority of cows in the modern food system do not actually eat grass for their whole lives.

There are many different reasons why most cows are fed grains:

- It's profitable for the farmer. Grains are more calorie-dense than grass, so they make the cow grow to slaughter weight faster (just like people, cows gain weight fast from eating grains!) This saves the farmer a lot of money, so profits go up.
- It's cheap for the consumer. The farmer passes down some of the cost savings to you, the person buying steak at the grocery store.
- There's consumer demand for grain-fed meat. The meat from grain-fed cows is typically quite fatty and very mild-tasting, and people are used to that taste now. Many consumers don't want the actual taste of beef from a cow that ate grass. They want their beef mild almost to the point of being bland.

Grass-Fed vs. Organic: "Grass-fed" is not the same thing as "organic." Organic meat can come from grain-fed cows, as long as the grain was organic. Some beef is both organic and grass-fed. But they're not the same thing!

Why Grass-Fed? Paleo is big on grass-fed meat, and not just because it's "natural" for cows to eat grass. Here are three reasons why:

Reason 1: Nutrition:

All beef is nutritious, but grass-fed beef is significantly more nutritious than grain-fed.

- Grass-fed beef is the only kind of beef that contains conjugated linoleic acid. Grain-fed beef has none. Conjugated linoleic acid is a type of fat that might be very important for preventing weight gain.
- Grass-fed beef has better fat quality. Specifically, it has significantly more anti-inflammatory Omega-3 fats and significantly fewer inflammatory Omega-6 fats. This is something to take with a grain of salt, because the absolute amount of both types of fat is quite low.
- Grass-fed beef has much more vitamin K2. Vitamin K2 is important for heart health and bone health: it helps get calcium into your bones (where it belongs) and not into your arteries (where it causes plaque and heart attacks).
- Grass-fed beef has more antioxidants, especially vitamin E. (By the way, all these things also apply to dairy from grass-fed cows)

Reason 2: Clean Water

If you don't want manure in your drinking water, you support grass-fed meat (well, or veganism, but if you're reading this, you're probably not a vegan).

Grain-fed meat is wrecking our water supply. It starts with the fields where we grow the corn that feeds the grain-fed cows: this kind of intensive farming depletes the soil of nutrients. We're destroying the only place we have to grow our food. So we dump fertilizer on it...but the fertilizer runs off into our lakes and rivers, makes the water unsafe to drink, and kills all the fish.

The actual farms where grain-fed cows are even more destructive. Grain-fed cows don't just live on pastures while eating grains. They live in huge, filthy barns called CAFOs (Concentrated Animal Feeding Operations). With all the cows cooped up in such a small space, CAFOs end up with a lot of manure to deal with, often manure full of antibiotic-resistant "superbugs." And that manure is constantly spilling out into the

water supply. This contaminates water and makes it unsafe to drink.

Grass-fed beef can go a long way towards addressing these problems – there’s obviously no need for huge fields of corn, so the fertilizer problem totally goes away. And since the cows are spread out and not crowded into filthy barns, they don’t need constant antibiotic treatment, so they don’t get antibiotic-resistant superbugs. Also, the manure is more manageable when the cows have more space to live.

Of course, there are other environmental reasons to oppose factory farming. And there are even more reasons that fall under the general heading of “what you do affects other people, so vote with your dollars.” For example, one other huge problem with factory farms is antibiotic resistance. Did you know that the vast majority of antibiotics used in the US go to farm animals? Drug resistance starts on the farm, not in the doctor’s office!

You could fill several books with all the reasons why factory farming is awful for the environment. But that would probably be overwhelming and exhausting – take water as an example case, and if you really want to know more, here’s a place to start.

Reason 3: Animal Welfare

This is a Paleo site, not an ethics site. But when your food involves taking the life of another sentient being, you can’t escape questions of ethics. If you “just don’t think about ethics,” that’s already a decision about ethics, and the decision is “I’m going to do whatever is easiest.”

You can make an ethical argument that eating meat is justified. But it’s almost impossible to justify treating cows the way they’re treated in factory farms.

The Rolling Stone recently did a great expose of animal abuse on factory farms – and how people who try to expose cruelty are being forcibly silenced. Warning: do not read that if you’re eating, or if you’re particularly sensitive to violence and brutality. At some point, it will make you want to throw up.

That’s not a defensible way to treat another sentient being. Ignoring it doesn’t make it go away. ■

Secretary Perdue Appoints New Leadership For Food Safety

August 2, 2017 (USDA) - U.S. Secretary of Agriculture Sonny Perdue made two key appointments to help fulfill the vital mission of the USDA to ensure the safety of the nation’s food supply. Perdue announced that Carmen Rottenberg was selected as Acting Deputy Under Secretary for Food Safety and Paul Kiecker was named Acting Administrator for the Food Safety and Inspection Service (FSIS). The two will serve in those capacities until presidential nominees are confirmed by the Senate for those roles. In making the announcements, Secretary Perdue issued this statement:

“Ensuring the safety of our nation’s food supply is our most important responsibility, and it’s one we undertake with great seriousness. Both Carmen and Paul have dedicated their careers to the mission of food safety and I am pleased to have appointed them to these important roles within the USDA,” said Secretary Perdue. “I commend the work of the entire USDA’s food safety team for painstakingly safeguarding the food we serve our families every single day.”

Background:

Carmen Rottenberg was appointed Acting Deputy Under Secretary for the USDA’s Office for Food Safety. In this position, she oversees development, implementation, and enforcement of all of FSIS regulations, policies, and programs. This appointment follows nearly six years in leadership roles in the FSIS Office of the Administrator, including serving as Chief of Staff, Chief Operating Officer and, most recently, Deputy Administrator.

In those leadership roles, Rottenberg executed a budget of over \$1 billion, prioritizing resources and resolving disputes, advancing the Agency’s vision and goals, and leading innovative solutions to challenges in FSIS. She spearheaded strategic planning at FSIS and implemented numerous initiatives to strategically move the agency forward. Rottenberg implemented two major reorganizations, leading to a more streamlined, efficient agency better positioned to carry out its food safety mission. Through her leadership and oversight, an early governance process matured into an established systematic approach to agency decision-making, resulting in more deliberative, science-based decisions that consider enterprise-wide risks and benefits. Rottenberg led the very successful i-Impact initiative, which has increased the awareness of and engagement in FSIS’s public health mission by the more than 9,000 employees throughout the Agency.

Rottenberg joined FSIS as an Equal Employment Opportunity Specialist in 2007, and went on to become the Deputy Director of the Civil Rights Staff. She began her federal government career in the Federal Trade Commission’s Office of General Counsel, and previously worked as law clerk at a small law firm in Fairfax, VA.

She holds a B.A. in Political Science and Philosophy from Hope College in Holland, MI and a law degree from American University's Washington College of Law.

Paul Kiecker was named Acting Administrator for the FSIS. Throughout his 29 years with FSIS, he has been committed to a strong public health vision that has guided him to overcome obstacles, identify opportunities for improvement, manage resources efficiently, and achieve food safety objectives to prevent foodborne illness.

Since joining FSIS in 1988 as a food inspector, Kiecker has served in a number of roles at the agency, most recently as Deputy Assistant Administrator for the Office of Field Operations. He came to Washington, D.C. to serve as Executive Associate for Regulatory Operations, after serving as the District Manager in Springdale, AR and Madison, WI, as well as Deputy District Manager in Madison, WI. Kiecker's experience with FSIS also includes work with the Office of Investigation, Enforcement, and Audit, where he has served as a Compliance Investigator and as Supervisory Compliance Officer.

In his various positions with FSIS, Kiecker has played a critical role in leading external coordination with other federal agencies, state and local governments, nonprofit and private sector organizations, international organizations, and law enforcement agencies. He also has had oversight responsibility for strategic planning, policy formulation and implementation, budget development and execution, human resource management, and day-to-day inspection operations. ■

Oregon Congressman Says Too Much USDA Money Supports the Wrong People Who Are Growing the Wrong Food in the Wrong Place.

August 2, 2017 (Capital Press) - Oregon Democrat Congressman Earl Blumenauer isn't on the House ag committee, but like many in the Portland district he represents, he's keenly interested in food and farming and has some ideas about how it should be supported in the next farm bill.

Blumenauer, familiar in Congress for his bow ties and bicycle lapel pins, has spent the past two years asking what the farm bill would look like if it were written for Oregon. That is, providing budget and policy support for small and organic farms, local food systems, conservation programs, sustainable ag practices and for growing fruit and vegetables instead of providing subsidies for "cotton grown in the desert," as he put it during an Aug. 1 appearance in Portland.

He believes the farm bill, up for reauthorization in 2018, gives "too much to the wrong people to grow the wrong food in the wrong places." He said USDA spending for the type of agriculture practiced in Oregon, with 220 commodities and emerging regional food hubs, amounts to a "rounding error" in the department's \$140 billion annual budget.

Blumenauer wants to change that. He's drafted the Food and Farm Act, essentially an alternative farm bill, and plans to introduce it this fall.

In a presentation at Zenger Farm in East Portland, Blumenauer said a farm bill revised to reflect Oregon's style of agriculture would find favor in many other farming states, including California and Washington.

He said the broad range of USDA's activities mean a revised farm bill would address problems across the country.

"The farm bill is the most important health bill," he said. "It's the most important environmental bill. It's an opportunity to link rural and small town Oregon with population centers. It's economic development. Anyone here eat? Drink water?"

"The punchline is that nobody understands the farm bill," Blumenauer continued. "The complexity, I think, in some cases is purposeful."

Organics, conservation work, fruit and vegetable "specialty crops" and small farms have been funded piecemeal, thrown financial "crumbs" in previous farm bills, he said. "We want to have a comprehensive farm bill that we offer up to have a point of departure, to change the conversation."

Blumenauer's Portland audience included Alexis Taylor, the Oregon Department of Agriculture director, and representatives from groups such as Oregon Tilth, which certifies organic operations, the Oregon Food Bank, the Oregon Winegrowers Association and Grand Central Cafe and Burgerville, local chains that prominently feature regionally produced food on their menus.

While generally supportive of Blumenauer's ideas on the farm bill, some in the audience questioned how the reforms will fare in an embattled Trump administration.

Blumenauer acknowledged the administration has "not displayed a lot of legislative dexterity" and said changes will have to be carried through Congress by a broad coalition.

"It's hard with this administration to know where to start," he said. Supporters should concentrate on "What we are for and why we are for it," he said.

"We need to build a coalition, build the case, and not be distracted by the next Dumpster fire." ■

Did You Know that Meat Companies are Linked to Biggest-Ever Dead Zone in the Gulf? NOT!

Read Closely to See How Weak the Evidence is.

August 3, 2017 (Modern Farmer) - This week, the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) revealed that the annual dead zone in the Gulf of Mexico is the largest ever measured.

Every year, around mid-summer, a "dead zone" appears in the Gulf of Mexico, just south of the Mississippi River Delta. It is, as its name suggests, a vast swath of highly polluted ocean in which oxygen levels are so low that fish cannot survive. It's attributed to runoff from the Mississippi River, particularly pollution from the big corn, soy, and wheat-growing states located northward along the river. NOAA has been mapping this dead zone since 1985, and announced this week that this year's is the largest ever measured—a patch of ocean about the size of New Jersey.

Shortly before NOAA's announcement, a non-governmental organization called Mighty Earth published its own findings on the dead zone and its causes. (Mighty Earth, a division of the primarily demilitarization-focused think tank Center for International Policy, campaigns for environmental and agricultural causes around the world.) Mighty Earth's findings go a step further, meting out blame to specific companies: meat producers Tyson Foods and Smithfield Foods, among others.

"America is one of the largest agricultural producers, and one of the largest meat producers, and our number one crops are corn and soy, the majority of which goes to feed the meat industry," says Lucia von Reusner, the campaign's director. "We decided to find out who is responsible for driving these supply chains and impacts across the country. And in the same vein, who has the leverage and the responsibility to shift those supply chains to more sustainable practices."

Von Reusner's point depends on examining the meat industry's overall supply chain in the U.S., which works mostly like this: primarily independent corn and soy farmers sell to farmers who raise livestock, many of which are technically independent, but exclusively supply one big company, like Tyson or Smithfield, which in turn often supplies both the birds and the feed to said farmers. That big company then buys animals for processing and sale. "It's important for us to point out the supply chain, and say, hey, we're not involved in the crop production business, and frankly, we own very few farms," says Gary Mickelson, Tyson's senior director of public relations, on a phone call.

But Mighty Earth isn't saying that the major meat companies are directly responsible for pollution; instead, they're saying that these companies are the fulcrum in the entire system -- the only entity with enough sway to truly change the way the whole system works. If Tyson or Smithfield decrees that they'll only buy animals that are fed with a soil-healthy diet, everything changes. The farmers toward the bottom of the supply chain don't have as much agency; large changes to the way they grow or raise animals could be more expensive and cut into their profits, and those farmers might not have a market for, say, rye or some other crop used to replenish the soil. The farmers can't really change how they farm, but, says Mighty Earth, the top-level buyer -- the meat companies -- have the ability to make those changes.

The research, using publicly available data from NOAA, the USDA, and the US Geologic Survey, compared locations of facilities owned by various companies with data concerning nitrate pollution levels. Tyson and Smithfield ran the highest number of facilities in the parts of the country with the highest levels of nitrate contamination.

If you're thinking that sounds like correlation and not causation, well, yes, sort of. Mighty Earth did factor in the size of the individual plants, meaning that a very small facility and a very large facility, though not equal in terms of pollution output, would show up as equally responsible on their map. And the size of the facility could reflect the amount of grain these companies buy from a given area. Tyson, for example, writes that they "buy local grain, which is used to raise our poultry, feed your community and feed the world," on its website. Bigger facilities could then equal substantially more local grain, and when that grain isn't grown with the environment in mind, could equal more pollution.

That said, the US meat market buys 40 percent of American corn (another 40 percent goes to ethanol) and 70 percent of American soybeans, and Tyson controls a whopping 25 percent of the entire meat market (that's chicken, beef, and pork). Tyson is also the only company to have facilities in all the states NOAA says contribute the most to the Gulf's dead zone.

In any case, Mighty Earth is very intentionally naming these companies; they believe that the best path to reducing contamination—as well as a whole host of other benefits, environmental and economic—is via public pressure on the point in the meat supply chain most able to effect change. "The meat industry is the dominant shaping force of how agriculture is produced in the United States," says von Reusner. Farmers are not really in much of a position to change anything; they farm what can sell, and their buyers are meat producers who demand corn and soy. That narrow-focused demand creates many of the problems in agriculture, the most

pressing of which is that monocropping depletes the soil of nutrients, forcing the use of more fertilizer, the excess of which runs into rivers and streams. "Tyson and other meat companies are really in the best position to shift the market, shift practices, shift incentives for agriculture across America," she says.

The upsides are strong for this case; aside from the fact that increasing incentives for crop rotation and responsible fertilizer and soil use is, it's fair to say, the morally correct thing to do, there's also money to be made here. Consumers are increasingly looking for, and sometimes willing to pay more for, sustainably produced food; organic food profits have outstripped conventional food profits by a mile over the past decade. If Tyson can figure out how to market it—and hopefully if the USDA can figure out how to regulate the claims—doing the right thing for the planet might also be doing the right thing for the stockholders.

We're currently waiting for Tyson to get back to us about whether the company has specific plans to assert itself over the supply chain in ways that might decrease fertilizer runoff. We'll update when they do. ■

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