

HCS HB 141 -- BEEF COMMODITY MERCHANDISING PROGRAM

SPONSOR: Reiboldt

COMMITTEE ACTIONS: Voted "Do Pass" by the Standing Committee on Agriculture Policy by a vote of 13 to 5. Voted "Do Pass with HCS" by the Select Committee on Agriculture by a vote of 7 to 3.

Currently, state fees are not allowed to be collected by the beef commodity merchandising program in excess of a commensurate amount credited against a federal assessment of beef producers. This bill establishes a referendum procedure for the Beef Commodity Council to follow in order to authorize the collection of state fees or to change the amount of the fee that includes submitting a petition approved by a 2/3 vote of the council or signed by 25% of Missouri beef producers to the Director of the Department of Agriculture. The petition must establish or modify a checkoff fee and specify the amount and manner of collection of the fee to be assessed.

Upon receipt of the petition, the department director must perform specified tasks including determining the legal sufficiency of the petition, establishing a list of beef producers, holding a public hearing on the proposed program, publishing a notice to beef producers, providing forms for beef producers to register with the department in order to be eligible to vote, approving or disapproving the petition, and holding a referendum after approval of a petition. The bill specifies the criteria to determine if the referendum passes.

A proposal to terminate the checkoff fee may be made by a majority of the council or by a petition of 10% of registered beef producers. The proposed termination must be submitted to a referendum under which a simple majority is required.

A referendum to change the amount of the fee or to make other major changes cannot be held within 12 months of a referendum conducted for a similar purpose. The fees imposed must be collected and remitted to the Missouri Beef Industry Council.

PROPONENTS: Supporters say that the bill allows the cattlemen in the state to vote to increase the state portion of the beef checkoff fee. The checkoff funds are used to market beef products in the state. Currently, the state may only charge the \$1 fee set by the national Beef Checkoff Program, of which half goes to the national program and half to the state program.

Testifying for the bill were Representative Reiboldt; David Dick, Missouri Cattleman's Association; and Missouri Farm Bureau.

OPPONENTS: There was no opposition voiced to the committee.

OTHERS: Others testifying on the bill discussed the procedure for holding a referendum, including how a producer registers and how the vote is calculated.

Testifying on the bill was Robert M. Russell, Missouri Beef Industry Council.