Farm Forum

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FEEDLOT POLLUTION CONTROL

By U.S. Sen. Bob Dole

The number of cattle on feedlots in Kansas has doubled in the last five years. Kansas feeders are now finishing nearly two million head yearly. More than 70 per cent of these grain fed cattle are on large commercial feedlots, those with a capacity of 1000 animals or more.

Just a few years ago, small feedlot operations were considered supplemental to normal farming operations; now the large feedlot operation is the rule rather than the exception. This trend in the livestock industry is not only responsible for superior beef, but because of increased efficiency, it is part of the reason the beef industry in Kansas passed the one billion dollar level in its 1969 gross sales.

The expansion of feedlot use, and the public's increasing concern for environmental protection have evoked much publicity about the problem of feedlot runoff. This is a genuine environmental concern, but as with all problems, must be examined from all sides. It is important that the subject of agricultural pollution receive our attention; but I have felt for some time that the urban dwellers' viewpoint has dominated the discussion of an issue that is of such direct importance to stockmen.

Agricultural Pollution Hearings

Therefore, I was pleased recently when the Senate Committee on Public Works granted my request that field hearings be conducted on the subject of agricultural pollution, and in particular, livestock feedlot pollution.

On April 2, the Public Works Subcommittee on Air and Water Pollution, of which I am a member, held the first Congressional hearing on this subject --- providing the livestock industry and the agricultural community an opportunity to be heard. The Kansas City area was selected for the hearing, primarily because of the successful experience Kansas has had in controlling feedlot pollution. By this hearing, the Subcommittee sought to learn more of the present and potential pollution problems, and of control regulations presently employed in some states.

I stressed in my hearing statement that in considering any federal standards that would affect feedlots, there must be at least two requirements:

-They must protect our present and future environment,

-They must be reasonable and economically feasible for the feedlot operator.

A healthy economy and environment are by no means at opposite poles. They can, and in the case of Kansas feedlot management, do coexist. This is the relationship I will urge be fostered when our Committee and Congress considers amendments to the Water Pollution Control Act. As a Kansan I cannot overlook the following facts:

-Beef production is Kansas' largest single industry.

-Meat packing ranks second.

-In terms of employment, in 1970, 6,300 Kansans worked in meatpacking; 17,900 were employed in food processing and distribution.

The stockmen of Kansas, as well as those from other beef producing states, must contribute their experience and knowledge to the projected formulation of a realistic, effective federal feedlot management policy.

Kansas Feedlot Pollution Control

Witnesses at this month's agricultural pollution hearing recognized the successful efforts of Kansas stockmen and of the Kansas Department of Health. At the conclusion of eight hours of testimony, several witnesses recommended, and I concurred, that Kansas state regulations for feedlot pollution be studied and utilized in the establishment of a federal policy.

> Kansas requires feedlot operators to register and install water pollution control facilities when the state health department determines a pollution potential exists. The registration permitting operation with the required controls, is revoked if the control facilities do not conform with those plans approved by the state.

This procedure has been in effect for a number of years, and has controlled feedlot runoff so that it has not become hazardous to the state's environment. The Kansas example may ultimately serve to make similar environmental protections possible for other states.

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