

Value-added venture keeps farm profitable

BUSHTON (AP) — About five years ago, Wayne Behnke looked at his small wheat farm, knowing he was faced with a looming question. How could farming continue to be profitable for the next generation, for his son, Ben?

Behnke knew he wasn't alone. Farm sales were commonplace, and the average age of the farmer was increasing. He already had an off-farm job to help supplement the farm income.

"We either had to expand our acreage or do something else," he said.

Then he reread a verse during a community Bible study: "Man shall not live by bread alone."

Maybe there is another way, he thought.

Last month, not long after completing the 2005 wheat harvest, Wayne Behnke and his wife, Tayna, sat in their a trailer-turned-laboratory not far from their home and the wheat acres they grow.

They'd found their idea. Now they're hoping the new value-

added venture will help keep their son on the family farm.

Called Behnke Berries Wheat Snacks, the product is made from the acres of wheat planted on the farm each fall and harvested in June. Tayna does the cooking, developing her own recipe and a two-step cooking process using olive oil and other flavorings that help keep the wheat berries crunchy.

"We just praise the Lord that we have wheat to produce," Wayne Behnke said of the venture. "But right now we are just starting out small."

Tayna Behnke said she would go to value-added producer meetings across the state to learn more about how to begin a business. Now they're looking for more marketing avenues.

His favorite flavors of the wheat snack are chocolate and ranch. Tayna Behnke's favorite is chocolate.

"I like salted," said Wayne Behnke with a laugh. "I usually have a good handful of salted every day."

Fed say it's safe to resume Canada beef imports

SAN FRANCISCO (AP) — Whether it's protecting profits or consumer health, the U.S. meat industry has a lot riding on the government's effort to reopen the border to Canadian cattle.

The U.S. Department of Agriculture insists it's safe to resume the imports, despite a ruling by a Montana federal judge who sided with ranchers warning about dire economic and health consequences from a mad cow outbreak in the United States. Feedlots and packers maintain that ranchers are only concerned about their profits.

A panel from the San Francisco-based 9th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals travels to Seattle on Wednesday to hear the Bush administration's challenge to the judge's ruling.

The dispute between ranchers — whose profits have improved slightly without Canadian competition — and feedlots and packers — which have fewer cows to slaughter without Canadian supplies — became more complicated two weeks ago, when the government revealed that a 12-year-old cow born in Texas tested positive for mad cow disease.

Ranchers, who back the ban put in place after a Canadian-born cow tested positive for mad cow disease in Washington state in 2003, said

the infected Texas cow shows the continued need for a closed border, to prevent an epidemic.

But Philip Olsson of the National Meat Association, a trade group representing packers, processors, equipment manufacturers and suppliers, said the Texas cow deflates the ranchers' argument that consumers would lose their appetite for U.S. meat if Canadian cattle were allowed in.

"They're not telling anybody not to eat their meat now, are they?" Olsson asked.

Some industry watchdogs say the argument is really all about profits, not consumer health. After all, Canadian and American cattle had been crossbreeding for so many years before the borders were closed that they are equally at risk, according to The Center for Media and Democracy in Madison, Wis., an advocacy group that has closely followed the issue.

Jon Wooster, who operates a family owned cattle ranch in central California, said he now sells his cattle for more than 80 cents a pound, and had been getting more than \$1 — up from about 70 cents right before Canadian cows were banned.

On the other side, profits have declined at packers and feedlots, which have fewer cows to feed and

process. They say Canada's cattle is safe, and that the ranchers' are more interested in monopolizing supplies than protecting the meat-eating public.

Cody Easterday, who runs a feedlot in Washington state that has been in his family for three generations, said he may go out of business rather than purchase cows 1,500 miles away in the Midwest — compared to about 550 miles in Alberta.

"It's pretty bleak," he said. "The local processor here is only running about 24 hours a week, compared to 40 to 48 hours a week before. We all know that the cattle from Canada is safe. This is protectionism."

The National Meat Association says its members have lost \$1.7 billion in revenue because of fewer cows being processed in the U.S., idling some packing houses and prompting layoffs. In 2002, Canada shipped 1.6 million cattle to the United States, its largest foreign market.

Meanwhile, Americans' appetite for beef is being supplemented by imports, including Canadian beef processed to remove parts susceptible to mad cow disease — including brains, bones, eyes and spinal cords — before crossing the border.

Canada and the United States each test about 1 percent of the herd at slaughter, compared to 25 percent

by the European Union and 100 percent in Japan, said Diane Farsetta, a senior researcher at the center whose work supported the 1997 book, "Mad Cow USA: Could the Nightmare Happen Here?"

"Just looking at it strictly from the health perspective, neither Canada nor the United States is doing what it needs to do," Farsetta said. "There is an artificial political and economic distinction being made between the two countries right now."

Mad cow disease is the common name for bovine spongiform encephalopathy, or BSE. People who eat meat tainted with BSE can contract a degenerative, fatal brain disorder called variant Creutzfeldt-Jakob disease. More than 150 people died from it following a 1986 outbreak in the United Kingdom.

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