

Yankton County Chatter

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It is hard to believe the summer is over as I feel we just celebrated high school graduation. Many of us celebrated the 4th of July, family reunions, and Riverboat Days by grilling brats, burgers, and hot dogs. One of the best smells of the summer was at Yankton Ribfest when all those pork ribs and roasts were being smoked! I am getting hungry!

South Dakota's weather lived up to the motto of infinite variety as August received more rain than June and July combined. Those dry months are directly impacting our economy and farmers, as those months are vital for corn production. Corn reports are predicting lower yields, meaning there will be less corn to sell. Compounding the situation is low corn prices which are around \$3/bushel. So what does this mean to us city slickers? A farmers "break even" on a bushel of corn is about \$3.50/bushel on a normal year of production. "Break even" means the cost to plant, raise, and harvest the crop along with family's living expenses. If the yields are lower than normal and prices are below \$3.50/bushel the farmer is losing money. When the farmers lose money, they are unable to spend money on Main Street for new/used equipment, vehicles, eating out, medical procedures, etc.

The hot topic this summer has been the applications for seven hog barns in Yankton County. This created a lot of debate and emotion. Yankton County passed the zoning ordinance by a vote of the people in 2003. These types of barns have been allowed by zoning as there have been no changes to zoning since 2008. The applications for the hog barns were located in an area Zoned Agriculture (Ag), were small facilities (second smallest per zoning classification), and met the set backs from a residence as defined in zoning.

Many questions and comments have been shared but one question never arose. If you don't raise livestock in the country (zoned ag) than where do you raise livestock? Where is the best place to raise livestock? Where do the ribs for next year's Ribfest come from? Where will your hot dogs, burgers, brats, and bacon come from?

I have visited multiple hog barns of different styles over the past several years and can tell you these modern facilities are a far improvement from when we raised hogs in the 1980's. The proposed barns the applicants brought forward in July are used throughout the United States, Canada, and Europe. Facilities like these are not experimental technology but accepted and proven modern facilities. They keep the animals out of the weather, provide constant food and water in a comfortable climate, and are better for the environment. Hogs raised in the 1980's were outside in the mud with dirt and dust. Modern facilities are clean and contain the manure in covered pits, much like our sewers. These barns are highly regulated by the State of South Dakota to ensure a safe environment. The manure is used as fertilizer (cheaper than chemical fertilizer) and only applied after an independent agronomist tests the soil and has a plan on how much can be applied to each field.

Do we want to restrict small business owners from expanding their business? Do we want to limit them to raise only a few products? Do we limit a large factory, medical facility, or retail store from expanding? Allowing our farmers to add livestock into their business allows them to have another product to sell when the crop prices are down. Modern livestock barns are efficient and allow the next generation to come back to the family business. Livestock is another market for corn and beans which means more demand and higher grain prices for our farmers.

Yankton County has a poverty rate of 14.2% and many children, parents, and the elderly can not afford food. I have seen first hand the many hungry people in Yankton County when I volunteer for the Sack Pack Program, Meals on Wheels, and the Banquet. The world population in 1970 was 3.6 billion, 1990 was 5.2 Billion, and now 7.5 billion. U.S. farmers are "Feeding the World." I have listened to professors and economist talk about the world population growing at an extremely high rate and we need to change on how we raise livestock and grain. These speakers state if we do not change how we grow and raise our food, by the year 2050 we will run out of food.

I ask you again, if we do not raise livestock in the country where do we raise livestock?