

Our Mission: *To promote and preserve unregulated direct farmer-to-consumer trade that fosters availability of locally grown or home-produced food products*

March 2010

In This Issue:

[Reflections on a Jar of Pickles](#)

By Lois Smith

[Buying Pork in Bulk](#)

By Richard Bean

[VICFA Notes](#)

[NAIS Follow-Up](#)

By Rowena Morrel

[Bone Broth](#)

By Kathryn Russell

Agribusiness Skewers Pickle Bills

By Christine Solem

The first step in the legislative process for the pickle bill, HB 60, was a subcommittee hearing, chaired by Del. Lohr, of the House Agriculture, Chesapeake and Natural Resources Committee. This bill would have exempted pickles, relish and salsa from an initial inspection of the home, if such products were sold at the home or farmers' markets and labeled, "NOT FOR RESALE, PROCESSED AND PREPARED WITHOUT STATE INSPECTION."

Deemed to be "controversial," HB 60 was placed in the subcommittee. (Most controversial bills are placed in subcommittee, as they take more time to hear.) Many bills do not survive subcommittee. Lohr's committee was a hostile subcommittee, made up of enough senior delegates with ties to agribusiness to effectively kill any bill we put to them. I knew our bill would have a hard time but I admit to being surprised at the effort expended by the Agribusiness council to kill our unpretentious bill.

In the January 25 subcommittee meeting, agribusiness brought out the big guns against homemade pickles. They predicted the downfall of the entire pickle industry in Virginia if this bill were to pass. They enlisted a Virginia Tech spokesperson to raise the specter of botulism, although they did not cite a single actual occurrence of botulism caused by homemade pickles. An FDA spokesman was there touting federal regulations and exhorting that no pickle-maker should be exempt from federal jurisdiction, although our bill had nothing to do with any federal regulation exemption.

VICFA representatives gave an excellent presentation, stressing the value of local sales to the economic health of Virginia, the safety of pickles, and consumer freedom to choose the food they wish to eat. We presented first, the opposition followed. We were not given any formal time for rebuttal. The subcommittee did not make a motion to either recommend passage or to kill the bill; thus HB 60 died for lack of a motion.

continued on page 5...

How naive of me to think that the traditional foods people have prepared and eaten for generations would be available for me to feed to my family. Alas, many of these homegrown, handmade items can no longer be purchased because of prohibitive regulations. If you can believe it, homemade pickles are illegal to purchase or sell.

Reflections on a Jar of Pickles

By Lois Smith

I grew up on sidewalks, not in the country, in a town called Lanham, MD (named after the Lanham family who sold their farm to suburban developers). Bunches of us walked by the original farmhouse to get our much sought-after McDonald's Hamburgers. Never once did we reflect on why they sold the farm. I just assumed no one would want to do all that farm work when there was a McDonald's. It seemed so much easier to walk up to a counter and order food than to chase it around a field.

Now that I'm aware how connected our eating habits are to our quality of life in every aspect of living, I am committed to changing back to a time when real food was an everyday event. To fulfill that calling, I realized that learning to navigate within the General Assembly is a necessity. Every VICFA member needs to realize that they are vital to this cause.

The Legislative Breakfast at the beginning of the lobbying season requires a lot of preparation – not just at VICFA meetings, but hours of telephoning, hours developing talking points, and more hours of lobbying before the breakfast to try and determine the lay of the land. The Legislative Breakfast just sets the stage for our lobbying efforts. This year we fed 300 people with only a handful of volunteers.

People love our homemade food and show appreciation by opening doors to legislators that would otherwise be harder to access. The staff people working in the General Assembly tell us stories of patronizing their local farmers markets and their desire to obtain good food.

After the breakfast, our first formal step was a hearing before the Agriculture sub-committee where our bill would be heard – a hearing which would determine

whether or not the full committee should take the time to hear the bill. This particular sub-committee determined that our pickle bill was not worthy of a vote. We can always count on opposition from agri-business, showing up to make sure we do not succeed. We were encouraged that Farm Bureau did not oppose this bill.

We prepared our arguments well, but, you see, it's hard to get delegates to side with us when only a few VICFA members showed up. We can whine and cry that our cause is just, but it is rather arrogant of us to think the delegates should stick their neck out when most small farmers, food producers, and consumers do not even bother to attend or register their opinions by phone or email.

Lobbying in order to be able to sell homemade pickles may seem like a joke to some, but it is because of similar efforts that VICFA members pushed through a bill allowing baked goods, jams and jellies to be made in uninspected kitchens. The pickle bill was only to add pickles to that list. How many people do you see selling jellies and baked goods now because of *our* efforts? What good is standing up for food freedom when most people choose enslavement by their inaction or let others act for them?

Several of us spent two more full days trying to resurrect the pickle bill, believing that common sense would prevail over the uninformed, that the right to make and sell and to buy local pickles would somehow be miraculously restored. In the days that followed we decided to fight on, finding four delegates at different times ready to oppose the sub-committee recommendations. Two of them backed out because of internal political pressure and two others stated that no constituents bothered to pick up the phone or contact them in support of the pickle.

You can believe that the government is the problem or you can take the responsibility to become part of the solution. A handful of VICFA members spent 5 full, uncompensated, days at the General Assembly to promote food freedom—not just pickles. Incidentally, none of those volunteers personally make pickles to sell. Our bill is not about whether we want to sell a pickle; it's about climbing out of a hole created by the erosion caused by piled-on regulations over the years. One reason the pickle bill did not succeed was because of the inactivity of our members. It might not have succeeded for many reasons, but this fact is evidence we can submit. Please read your legislative alerts and respond to your delegates, otherwise, those of us in the trenches cannot succeed.

adjust the way it is to be cut up (this is just an example of what we can do). A half pig will almost fill 2 banana boxes in volume.

This same pig would probably return us about \$750 if sold as individual cuts, so a savings of \$100 or about 15% would result for the customer who bought a whole processed pig (plus the convenience of having the meat on hand!).

Where do these prices come from? I will give you some estimated costs and a desired profit to the farm. It costs about \$1 per pound to raise a pig to 250 lbs (that is, \$250), another \$175 in processing costs (totaling \$425). A selling price of \$650 equals a 35% return to the farm. We believe we are charging a fair price for our labor and investment; if we didn't, we would not be sustainable.

Two other things we feel are important from Double H Farm's perspective are *fat content* and *breed*. So brutalized in the media, but so crucial to a good meat eating experience, quality meat standards have always been fat based; juiciness, tenderness, and mouth feel are all enhanced by quality fat. Our Berkshire breed of pigs has been famous for their meat eating qualities for a couple of centuries, first in England, and in the United States since the 1880's. Berkshires have consistently been the carcass champions at the National Barrow show and National Livestock Exhibition. We chose this breed because of these great eating qualities, to put the best pork on your plates.

You can also raise a pig for your own freezer. Buy an eight week old pig, feed it up to a desired weight, process it for the freezer and enjoy. Sounds easy enough, but like any enterprise it has its nuances and learning curves. It can and is being done by others who have the space and desire to do it.

One last tidbit, and an important bit of information: pork is the most nutrient-dense of our red meats, which means it is a little harder to digest. This is why so many pork recipes include or are made with fruits like apples, figs or prunes, raisins, cherries, and, of course, pineapple. These fruits improve and enhance the digestibility of pork dishes so you can get the full nutrition from them.

BON APETIT!

Buying Pork in Bulk

By Richard Bean of Double H Farm

For a family who would like to buy pork by the half or whole, it *is* possible to save money, be assured of quality meat, know where your meat comes from and how it was raised, and help support your local farmers. A pig is not all juicy pork chops; it is also baked ham, tasty barbecue, mouth watering spare-ribs, hearty roasts, bone broths, crispy bacon, and of course succulent sausages.

Using the Double H Farm protocol, I will give examples of how to purchase pork by the half or whole. First, the customer has a responsibility to know something of what is supposed to transpire and what they want in the end. Here are some things buyers might want to know: at what age or weight is the animal slaughtered (the optimal age range is 6-9 months). What is the price per pound, at what stage of processing? What is the animal's primary diet? What are availability dates? How is meat packaged? How much volume should I expect? What cuts can I expect? Can I have my pork custom cut? How long will the meat keep frozen (up to a year)? Ask plenty of questions of the farmer from whom you choose to buy.

At Double H Farm, we raise our pigs to a finished weight of about 250 lbs, with a 70% dressed weight, which yields a 175 lb carcass weight for a whole pig, and 87.5 lbs for a half. We charge \$650 for a whole pig (about \$3.70 per lb), and \$350 for a half (about \$4.00 per lb). The half includes about 16 chops at 1 inch thick, 1 sheet of spareribs, a 4-5 lb butt- roast, and an 8-9 lb shoulder roast. It also includes a 1.5 lb sirloin, 6-7 lbs bacon, 3 hams from 1.5—3.5 lbs each, and 2 hocks that can be fresh or smoked, as well as 6-8 lbs of bones for stock and about 15-20 lbs of breakfast style sausage. We package the cuts according to the customers wishes, and we can

VICFA Notes

NOTES FROM THE FEBRUARY 14 MEETING

- **Kathryn Russell's** court challenge to the Virginia scrapie regulations for goats and sheep will proceed, pending the substitution of her husband as the plaintiff in this case.

The onerous Virginia scrapie regulations for goats and sheep require a farmer to obtain a premises ID, individually identify all his goats and sheep, and keep records for five years, subject to inspection by VDACS, every time a sexually intact goat or sheep is bartered, leased, traded, loaned, sold, exhibited or otherwise moved from one management to another. Portrayed by opponents as a back door to NAIS, since the requirements are the same, this case is of utmost importance.

- **Christine Solem** will now represent VICFA on monthly conference calls with other anti-NAIS organizations, organized by Judith McGarry
- **Willard Lutz** was added to the board of directors following the resignation of Karen Oxford.
- VICFA Movie and Homemade Refreshment Night will be happening on March 20 at 5:30pm. Please consult the web site (www.vicfa.org) for further details.

THANKS

- To Guy and Sue Freesen, of Staunton for hosting the February Meeting
- To Richard Bean for his article on purchasing pork.
- To Lois Smith and Christine Solem for articles on the Legislative efforts in the General Assembly regarding pickles.
- To John Coles, Wayne Bolton, Carlos Arostegui, Lois Smith, Christine Solem, Anne Buteau, Dan and Callie Walker, Richard Altice, Jayne Warriner, Alexa Boker, Emily Gross, Bev Hill. Laura Russell, Suzi Croes, Guy and Sue Freesen and Kimberly Hartke, Emily Gross, Dawn Story, Stephanie Smith, Miranda and Juliet Croes.

Come to Our March Meeting!

Karen Oxford will host the March meeting to be held on March 14 at 1PM, (now that daylight saving time will be in effect.) Business Meeting begins at 1PM, Lunch is at 2PM followed by the General Membership Meeting. All three sessions are open to the public. A Pot Luck lunch is always enjoyed by all.

Directions: There will be signs...follow the signs.

Sunday, March 14

1850 Browns Gap Tpke

Charlottesville, VA 22901

From east, take Rt. 250 west towards Crozet.

Immediately after crossing Mechums River bridge turn right onto Browns Gap Tpke. Follow Browns Gap 1.7 miles (past Beaver Creek Park) and house is on left.

From west, take 64 over to Crozet exit. Turn left at bottom of ramp onto Rt. 250 going east and follow 4.6 miles. After passing under a large railroad trestle, turn left at Rt 240 toward Crozet. Go 50 feet to stop sign and turn right, and IMMEDIATELY left onto Browns Gap Tpke. Follow 1.7 miles and house is on the left.

- To Laura and Lynn Russell who serve on the editorial committee for VICFA Voice and to Alexa for proof reading each month.
- To Virginia Biological Farming Conference for their generous accommodations.

MEET THE FARMER TV

For those of you who wished to watch the 56th episode of Meet The Farmer TV on 2009 Farm Food voices on channel FSTV, it was preempted by their fund drive and it may be seen during the week of March 15 and it is available to view any time at

<http://Watch.MeetTheFarmer.tv>.

MEMBER DISCOUNTS

Are there any products that you would like to promote to VICFA members at a discount? Consider publishing your discount offerings in the newsletter so that all members may take advantage. Just send a note describing your offer to editor@vicfa.net or mail to Editor, VICFA, PO Box 915, Charlottesville VA 22902.

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Agribusiness claims that the issue is food safety – yet it is agribusiness that is most often cited for food safety violations. If the issue is food safety, then ours is the food safety bill because our bill promotes local foods.

This bill didn't invoke the "hot" items such as raw milk or meat; it was just about pickles. Our policy has always been one of deference to food choice – we let agribusiness go its own way and we go ours. However, it became clear to me on January 25 that agribusiness is not interested in food safety; it is afraid of not protecting big agribusiness (pickle manufacturing), and more to the point, they don't want us ever to win.

The pickle bill will be introduced again next year without relish and salsa. We have already started lobbying, and copies of the movie FOOD, INC. were hand delivered to all legislators on the House Agriculture, Chesapeake and Natural Resources Committee on February 3 as part of our ongoing efforts to produce and sell foods directly to consumers.

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USDA announces new and more flexible framework for animal traceability.

NAIS Follow Up

By Rowena Morrel

The New York Times reported on February 5, 2010 that the USDA would drop its program to trace all livestock under the National Animal Identification System (NAIS), when, in fact, the USDA was announcing a new and more flexible framework for animal traceability. While the NAIS plans called for tracking every livestock animal in the country, the USDA stated that its new plan would apply only to animals moved in interstate commerce.

Agriculture Secretary Vilsack, after a series of public meetings or “listening tours” on the subject, was inundated with strident opposition from farmers and ranchers. He stated that the new plan would seek to be able to trace animals back to the state of origin and that additional trace back will be left to the states. The new framework would focus on animals that move in interstate commerce. Therefore, small producers, who raise animals to move within state and local markets as well as feed themselves, their families, and neighbors, will apparently not be part of the scope and focus of the new framework. He acknowledged that NAIS had received a “failing grade” and that he does not intend to use preferential funds to implement state efforts.

The \$142 million in federal financing gained the participation of only 40% of the nation’s livestock producers. Independent farmers and ranchers objected to the cost of identification equipment and reporting

procedures required. The system was purported to be a voluntary system that many feared would become mandatory and further feared that it was intrusive and that the federal government would use it to pry into their lives and finances.

In his statement, Vilsack said, “After concluding our *listening* tour on NAIS in 15 cities across the country, receiving thousands of comments from the public and input from States, Tribal Nations, industry groups and representatives for small and organic farmers, it is apparent that a new strategy for animal disease traceability is needed. I’ve decided to revise the prior policy and offer a new approach to animal disease traceability with changes that respond directly to the feedback we heard.”

Apparently he was not listening!

Faced with stiff resistance from ranchers and farmers, USDA and the administration decided to scrap the national program intended to identify and track livestock disease outbreaks. New federal rules will be developed that would apply only to animals being moved in interstate commerce. Anticipating that it would require some two years to create new federal rules, it was not clear how far the government would go to restrict interstate movement of livestock if animals did not meet basic traceability standards.

As early as March 2010, the USDA will convene to provide guidelines and receive input on what should be a part of the animal disease traceability framework and eventual regulations. By next winter they hope to publish proposed rules and at that time a 90-day comment period is planned.

This may only be a conciliatory victory—the issue of electronic tagging and tracking of livestock is not over. The agribusiness and technology companies will undoubtedly push for burdensome regulations, both in the new USDA framework and at the state level, so we continue to have a lot of work to do.

Note:

Christine Solem will now represent VICFA on monthly conference calls with other anti-NAIS organizations, organized by Judith McGarry.

COOK'S CORNER

Bone Broth

Written by Kathryn Russell for November '09 issue of In The Kitchen Magazine and edited for publication in VICFA Voice

This winter weather makes a body ready for a bowl of nourishing, bone-warming soup or stew. Nourishing homemade bone broth is the perfect base for a myriad of meals from a pot and as satisfying as nothing else. While there are as many ways to create a delicious and nutritious broth base as there are cooks, there are some basics that ensure that maximum flavor and nutrition are gleaned from the ingredients. Broth may be made from any bones. When created at home, it has many more benefits than what is commercially available. Making broth is incredibly easy, but it takes time. Once you are accustomed to making a batch of broth and canning or freezing it, going back to “store bought” won't be a temptation. The taste and health benefits will convince you!

I hoard bones and scraps from our meals, throw them in the freezer, and when it is broth time, I drag them out, along with my “scrap bucket,” and create a batch of broth. At my house, we don't waste a scrap. What doesn't go into the stockpot can go to the dog, cats, or chickens. When I roast poultry, I deglaze the pan, and if I'm going to wait to make broth, the liquid is frozen with the carcass for later use. Don't forget to include the skin, as well as feet if you have them. Here on the farm, we have the entire animal available. When I take an animal to the abattoir, I request all of the bones. You can ask for bones, as well as chicken feet, from some butchers and markets.

For larger animal bones, such as beef and lamb, browning adds flavor and color, while the amino acids fuse with the sugars to create a nice, robust flavor. When browning bones, it is important that they have some fats to fuse. I combine different types of bones, such as knucklebones, blade bones, and marrowbones that all offer benefits in both flavor and nutrition. Minerals are easily extracted into the broth, and substances such as chondroitin sulphate and glucosamine are abundant and soothing after a day of

wintery weather. The marrow, collagens, and cartilage all offer a complex body and taste, while providing a food that can also be described as a medicine for all the benefits it offers. You won't get that from commercial broth.

Basic broth can be made with bones and scraps, browned or not, covered with cold water. It is important to use cold water, as it helps to create a successful consommé when chilled. Don't rush! Let the bones rest for an hour or so before you turn on the heat. Soaking them loosens the structure and will help with flavor and gelatin release. Cover the bones with about 3” of good water (don't use chlorinated city water if you have options). Next, add a nice splash of vinegar or lemon juice (two tablespoons per gallon) to help release all the nutrients during cooking. I sometimes add garlic, onions, leftovers, and chilis, but more often than not I create a clear broth, then make my soup or stew from strained broth. Turn on the pot to a low simmer; when a scum forms, skim it all off. It will negatively impact the taste and it looks yucky. Now, lower the temperature to a very slow simmer and abandon the project for 4-48 hours! Once you come back to the broth, it will be ready for straining. The timing varies according to your schedule and the type of broth. Fish rarely requires more than four hours. Chicken might simmer overnight, 6-10 hours. I often leave in larger animals' bones for a day or two at a gentle simmer.

At the end of the simmer, let the pot cool down, then clean off the meat. After taking the usable meat out, I put everything back together, let it get friendly, and then strain the broth for clarity. Now you are ready to have a nice warm cup of broth and ponder what delightful winter dishes you can create. The residue and bones are thoroughly enjoyed by whatever critters I decide to bestow them upon.



VICFA

PO Box 915

Charlottesville, VA 22902

VICFA

Virginia Independent Consumers and Farmers Association

President, Wayne Bolton

Vice President, Lois Smith

Secretary, Laura Russell

Treasurer, Carroll Ann Friedman

Newsletter Editor, Rowena Morrel

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Website: www.VICFA.org

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