



23RD NAVAJO NATION COUNCIL OFFICE OF THE SPEAKER

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Navajo Beef program seeks to expand opportunities for Navajo families

ALBUQUERQUE – Speaker LoRenzo Bates (Nenahnezad, Newcomb, San Juan, Tiis Tsoh Sikaad, Tse'Daa'Kaan, Upper Fruitland) recently met with the Blair Labatt, the president of Labatt Food Service, a food distribution company based in the state of Texas which partners with the Navajo Nation Gaming Enterprise and Bashas' grocery stores to offer "Navajo Beef" to consumers in various locations in the southwest.

"Navajo Beef" is a brand that began in 2013 under Labatt Food Service, which strives to produce "USDA Choice" beef that comes from cattle that are raised in an area known as Padres Mesa Ranch, a 60,000 acre demonstration ranch in Newlands, located near Sanders. Labatt Food Service currently purchases approximately 400 cattle annually from 43 Navajo families who participate in the demonstration ranch program. In addition, families from the Eastern Navajo Agency participate in the "Navajo Beef" program as well.

The Padres Mesa demonstration ranch program is supported by the Office of Navajo and Hopi Indian Relocation, which manages the range lands in the Newlands area by maintaining the fences and water wells for relocated families who are raising cattle.

Labatt said the program has grown since its inception to point that the company has decided to phase out a separate beef-producing program to focus more on the expansion of "Navajo Beef" in the southwest. According to information provide by Labatt Food Service, the program teaches Navajo ranchers the principles of herd management including vaccination care, cattle genetics, overgrazing prevention, and others.

Labatt has also met with the members of the Navajo-Hopi Land Commission to present a proposal to establish a Navajo Nation enterprise that would be delegated with the authority to manage the Padres Mesa Ranch and to expand the "Navajo Beef" market.

Speaker Bates stated that while the concept of growing cattle herds and providing economic opportunities for Navajo ranching families is positive, there would be many complex issues that would have to be addressed if the Nation is to assume the duties of supporting the program.

"The cattle market is very complex and constantly changing and when you tie that in with this proposal to change management of the program, it becomes very challenging and raises a lot of questions that need to be answered," added Speaker Bates, adding that the intent of the recent

meeting was to learn more about the program in order to provide input and guidance as requested by Labatt Food Service.

Chris Bavasi, executive director of ONHIR, told the House Appropriations Subcommittee in February of last year of its intent to phase out its work on relocation efforts.

The need for the ONHIR has also come into question by congressional members, however, leaders from the Navajo Nation have requested that the office remain open to allow for continued support of the Padres Mesa demonstration ranch to expand and provide more opportunities for Navajo ranchers to raise and sell cattle as a means of creating income and economic growth for the Newlands area.

Speaker Bates said he is open to more discussions to evaluate and determine how the program may grow and become more beneficial for Navajo families and ranchers. To learn more about the “Navajo Beef” program, please visit <http://www.labattfood.com>.

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