

WASTEBOOK

THE FARCE AWAKENS

10 THE OTHER WHITE MEAT

Iowa
National Pork Board
\$3 MILLION

DC lobbyists are feeding at the trough of a Washington pork project that has pig farmers hogtied and squealing.

In a very unusual deal, the National Pork Producers Council (NPPC) is bringing home the bacon from a government sponsored board for the sale of the slogan “The Other White Meat,” which was put out to pasture years ago.ⁱ

The NPPC owns the rights to “The Other White Meat” slogan, which had been used as part of the National Pork Board’s campaign to increase pork consumption. The board agreed to pay \$3 million to the NPPC every year as part of a 2006 deal to purchase the slogan for \$60 million to be paid over 20 years.ⁱⁱ

The slogan was then retired in 2011 when the board adopted the new slogan, “Pork: Be Inspired.”ⁱⁱⁱ The board, however, has continued to make the annual payment to the pork lobby “despite having the right to cancel the deal with a year’s notice.”^{iv}

The National Pork Board, which is funded by mandatory fees imposed on hog farmers and others in the pork industry, was created by the “Pork Promotion, Research, and Consumer Information Act of 1985.”^v The law created a “check off” requiring farmers and importers to pay 40 cents on every \$100 earned from the sale of hogs and pig products.^{vi} The fees collected for the board total nearly \$100 million a year.^{vii} The funds are intended to support research the promotion of pork products but are not permitted to be spent on lobbying.^{viii}

This deal guarantees payments to a lobbying organization over two decades for the rights to a slogan with no intention of using it.

While the arrangement surely makes NPPC lobbyists as happy as pigs in mud, it has raised the eyebrows of the farmers who are being treated as piggybanks to pay the fees.

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Critics say it is a “payout” to the “industrial pork lobby that has long been closely tied to the board.” Many of the farmers who are paying the fees to finance the board maintain “the deal amounts to a scheme to let the board skirt anti-lobbying laws and promote an agenda directly against their interests.”^{ix}

A coalition of small hog farmers and the Humane Society of the United States have joined forces to file a lawsuit “to undo the deal and recoup the millions of dollars already paid for the defunct ‘other white meat’ slogan.”^x

Small farmers “see the rich payments for a defunct slogan as an egregious example of the government taking their money and then letting it be siphoned off to an industry group.”^{xi} Critics say the two entities “are essentially colluding through a deal that lets the Pork Board funnel money to the NPCC by assigning an absurdly inflated value to the “other white meat” slogan; the money then goes to promote the NPCC’s lobbying agenda.”^{xii}

The cozy relationship between the board and the lobbying council was also highlighted by the USDA Office of Inspector General (OIG). “The Board has relinquished too much authority to its primary contractor, the National Pork Producers Council (NPPC), and has placed the NPPC in a position to exert undue influence over Board budgets and grant proposals,” the OIG reported in a 1999 report.^{xiii}



The Other White Meat[®]

The pork lobby is pigging out on federal funds collected from mandatory fees imposed on pig farmers. The National Pork Board is paying \$60 million to the National Pork Producers Council for the defunct slogan “Pork: The Other White Meat,” which was retired in 2011.

The majority of hog farmers voted to eliminate the checkoff altogether in a referendum held in 2000.^{xiv} “A program that imposes mandatory assessments on pork producers and importers must have the demonstrable support of its participants in order to achieve the objectives of the law. The pork checkoff program does not have that support,” declared then-USDA Secretary Dan Glickman who ordered the board to be shut down as soon as possible.^{xv} A lawsuit by the NPPC and a change in Administration saved the board’s bacon from the butcher’s ax.^{xvi}

The NPPC will spend about half-a-million dollars on lobbying this year,^{xvii} which is just a fraction of the \$3 million annual sum it collects from the National Pork Board. While this money is not allowed to be spent on lobbying, Hugh Espey, the executive director of Iowa

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Citizens for Community Improvement who is part of the lawsuit to recoup the payments made to the NCCP, says “it’s a shell game.”^{xviii}

What no one can dispute is that the arrangement smells worse than a pig.

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- ⁱ Danny Vinik, “A \$60 million pork kickback?,” Politico, August 30, 2015; <http://www.politico.com/agenda/story/2015/08/a-60-million-pork-kickback-000210> .
- ⁱⁱ Danny Vinik, “A \$60 million pork kickback?,” Politico, August 30, 2015; <http://www.politico.com/agenda/story/2015/08/a-60-million-pork-kickback-000210> .
- ⁱⁱⁱ Michael J. Crumb, “Pork board swaps ‘White Meat’ for ‘Be Inspired,’” Associated Press, March 4, 2011; http://usatoday30.usatoday.com/money/industries/food/2011-03-04-pork_N.htm .
- ^{iv} Danny Vinik, “A \$60 million pork kickback?,” Politico, August 30, 2015; <http://www.politico.com/agenda/story/2015/08/a-60-million-pork-kickback-000210> .
- ^v Text of the Pork Promotion, Research, and Consumer Information Act of 1985, Public Law 99–198, title XVI, § 1612, 99 Stat. 1607, signed December 23, 1985; <http://www.pork.org/wp-content/uploads/2010/01/porkact.pdf> .
- ^{vi} “About Pork Checkoff and the National Pork Board,” National Pork Board website, accessed September 18, 2015; <http://www.pork.org/about-us/> .
- ^{vii} Danny Vinik, “A \$60 million pork kickback?,” Politico, August 30, 2015; <http://www.politico.com/agenda/story/2015/08/a-60-million-pork-kickback-000210> .
- ^{viii} Danny Vinik, “A \$60 million pork kickback?,” Politico, August 30, 2015; <http://www.politico.com/agenda/story/2015/08/a-60-million-pork-kickback-000210> .
- ^{ix} Danny Vinik, “A \$60 million pork kickback?,” Politico, August 30, 2015; <http://www.politico.com/agenda/story/2015/08/a-60-million-pork-kickback-000210> .
- ^x Danny Vinik, “A \$60 million pork kickback?,” Politico, August 30, 2015; <http://www.politico.com/agenda/story/2015/08/a-60-million-pork-kickback-000210> .
- ^{xi} Danny Vinik, “A \$60 million pork kickback?,” Politico, August 30, 2015; <http://www.politico.com/agenda/story/2015/08/a-60-million-pork-kickback-000210> .
- ^{xii} Danny Vinik, “A \$60 million pork kickback?,” Politico, August 30, 2015; <http://www.politico.com/agenda/story/2015/08/a-60-million-pork-kickback-000210> .
- ^{xiii} “AGRICULTURAL MARKETING SERVICE CONTROLS OVER PORK CHECKOFF FUNDS,” U.S. Department of Agriculture Office of Inspector General, March 1999; <http://www.usda.gov/oig/webdocs/018011kc.pdf> .
- ^{xiv} “Pork producers kill ‘other white meat’ campaign,” Associated Press, January 12, 2001; http://napavalleyregister.com/news/pork-producers-kill-other-white-meat-campaign/article_29b14d82-0c38-5f3d-b80b-426720139e55.html .
- ^{xv} “Pork producers kill ‘other white meat’ campaign,” Associated Press, January 12, 2001; http://napavalleyregister.com/news/pork-producers-kill-other-white-meat-campaign/article_29b14d82-0c38-5f3d-b80b-426720139e55.html .
- ^{xvi} Danny Vinik, “A \$60 million pork kickback?,” Politico, August 30, 2015; <http://www.politico.com/agenda/story/2015/08/a-60-million-pork-kickback-000210> .
- ^{xvii} “Annual Lobbying by the National Pork Producers Council,” OpenSecrets.org, accessed September 21, 2015; <https://www.opensecrets.org/lobby/clientsum.php?id=D000000676&year=2015> .
- ^{xviii} Danny Vinik, “A \$60 million pork kickback?,” Politico, August 30, 2015; <http://www.politico.com/agenda/story/2015/08/a-60-million-pork-kickback-000210> .