

**Statement from the Oklahoma Beef Council Board of Directors and  
Executive Director, Heather Buckmaster**

The Oklahoma Beef Council is led by a voluntary board of beef and dairy producers, so we understand and appreciate the concerns recently expressed by some producers. In July 2016, OBC discovered one of its employees, Melissa Morton, had committed fraud against OBC and its board of directors, employees, and constituents. Since the fraud was discovered, we have worked tirelessly toward full recovery through every available avenue, and we are continuing to do so.

Morton's crime occurred through an incredible abuse of trust and deceit that included falsifying financial documents, bank statements, and checks. Despite annual audits (and one year of multiple audits) by outside accounting firms, the fraud was never detected. It is still shocking that one of our long-standing, trusted employees would steal from OBC and the hard-working farming and ranching families we represent. But it's important to know the significant steps we have taken since the discovery.

As soon as the fraud was detected, OBC immediately fired Morton and launched an in-depth forensic investigation, led by a respected and capable outside accounting firm. One of the primary purposes of the investigation was to determine the extent of Morton's fraud and to identify the steps needed to safeguard OBC from such conduct in the future. Additionally, we notified law enforcement and have cooperated fully with federal investigators throughout their criminal investigation. At this point, Morton has pled guilty and is currently awaiting her sentencing.

While Morton was the one engaged in the fraud, however, you should understand, we are aggressively engaged in additional recovery and restitution efforts including all legal remedies, and will continue those efforts until our organization has recovered as fully as possible.

The beef producers of this state put their trust in OBC, and we take this trust extremely seriously. We have already taken steps to ensure the integrity of the Beef Checkoff in Oklahoma and a greater level of accountability generally. For example, we now work with a third-party accounting firm with circulating accountants and have instituted a five-step review process for monthly financials. We also utilize positive pay, an automated fraud detection tool, and have instituted an Audit/Risk Committee. Finally, we employ a director of compliance to provide oversight of the Beef Checkoff collections, and we continue to be audited annually by a reputable accounting firm.

Through all of this, our staff and board have remained focused on the mission of OBC and moved forward with important programs, including beef nutrition outreach to Oklahoma physicians, digital marketing campaigns targeted at Millennials to drive more beef purchases, beef education in the classroom, and export promotions in Japan for US Beef. For a list of program highlights, please visit our website at [www.oklabeef.org](http://www.oklabeef.org).

The Beef Checkoff is the only collective tool we have as farming and ranching families to continue promoting and protecting beef demand. It's essential to remember that for every dollar invested in the Beef Checkoff, the return to the industry is \$11.20. As beef producers ourselves, we feel tremendous regret over Morton's fraud. However, addressing the situation head-on with integrity, resolve, and a commitment to the families we serve has been our priority from the beginning, and it will continue to be our priority moving forward. And, as devastating as Morton's actions were, we cannot allow one person's egregious acts to overshadow the years of important work that has been done and will continue to be done by the Oklahoma Beef Council because of the Beef Checkoff.

As always, we look forward to serving the beef producer families in Oklahoma with the focused mission of driving beef demand and protecting our livelihoods.