



Meeting Consumer Expectations

Consumers want food from sustainable systems, but don't know what sustainable means.

by **Troy Smith**, field editor

The chances are pretty slim. It's not likely that today's food shopper will buy a finished steer; take it home to butcher in the backyard; and cut the carcass up into steaks, roasts and ground beef. Those chores fall to the beef packer.

"The packer is a necessary evil. You kind of need the packer," joked Cameron Bruett while addressing cattle producers attending the 2017 Cattle Industry Convention in Nashville, Tenn.

The head of corporate affairs for JBS USA, the world's largest animal protein processing company, Bruett spoke during the Cattlemen's College® opening session, reminding attendees that the beef industry is composed of diverse but interdependent segments. For long-term success, each needs the others. There is a need, he said, for industry stakeholders to collaborate in addressing the expectations of beef consumers.

In simpler times, noted Bruett, beef was marketed on the basis of its taste and its quality. Now, consumers want more, such as certification that the beef they buy was produced "naturally," "organically" or "humanely." They express concern for how production practices impact the environment and animal welfare, calling for beef that is produced "sustainably." However, Bruett added, they don't necessarily know what that means.

Yet, the traditional production system is vilified, with no consideration for the fact that if beef production is not profitable, neither is it sustainable.

"The truth is that no single marketing attribute makes [a production system] sustainable," said Bruett, "but any one societal, environmental or economic failure makes it unsustainable."

Bruett called for industry collaboration

in sending consumers the message that beef producers prioritize the planet, people, animals and progress. The message must make it clear that there is not just one way of doing that, and all production systems are viable when the outcome is sustainable. To help get the message across, producers must be transparent in telling their story.

That, said Bruett, is an involuntary reality.

"Realize that consumers aren't going to suddenly get rational and start praising us," concluded Bruett, explaining that industry transparency must become the new normal. "Consumers can be helped to understand what we do, how we do it and why."

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Editor's Note: Field Editor Troy Smith is a freelance writer and cattleman from Sargent, Neb. This article was written as part of Angus Media's coverage of the 2017 Cattle Industry Convention. For complete coverage, visit www.angus.media.