

Defining Sustainable Beef

Roundtable seeks to define sustainable beef production on a global level.

Defining what constitutes sustainable beef production is not an easy task. Given the vast differences in climate, available forages and grains, water resources, management practices and labor from one beef-producing region to another around the globe, a definition must be constructed carefully in order to fully communicate the principles of sustainability and sustainable practices.

Working as a committee within the Global Roundtable for Sustainable Beef (GRSB), representatives from Argentina, Australia, Brazil, Canada, the European Union, and the United States met during April in Chicago, Ill., to begin work that will lead to GRSB's definition framework for sustainable beef; however, more experts are needed.

"It is imperative that a full range of subject-matter experts in the many areas of beef sustainability be involved in this process," says Bryan Weech, a member of GRSB's Executive Committee and director for livestock at the World Wildlife Fund. "We need to assure that all areas and points of view are represented so that the definition developed is as accurate and complete as possible."

GRSB's Beef Sustainability Definition Committee is chaired by Ruaraidh (Rory) Petre who is also GRSB's executive director.

"The Global Roundtable was formed in 2012 as an international nonprofit organization, and one of its first efforts has been the formation of a highly qualified committee of members and others who are experts in beef sustainability," Petre explains. "The Definition Committee has broad geographic diversity and is intent

on identifying the key principles of beef sustainability, as well as a clear path forward for the creation of criteria to fit under those principles."

In the development of the principles and criteria, the committee has agreed to adhere to a set of credibility principles as follows:

- ▶ Sustainable — clearly and objectively defined.
- ▶ Relevant, rigorous, engaged — with a balanced representative group of stakeholders.
- ▶ Impartial, transparent, accessible — inclusive.
- ▶ Truthful and efficient — engaged with other initiatives in a similar space.

Petre was clear in stating, "The Definition Committee is working on principles and criteria and next steps towards regional development of indicators; but there is no plan to develop a seal, certification or comparable standard."

The core principles identified by the committee during its April meeting include people, community, animal well-being, food, natural resources, efficiency and innovation. Criteria under the principles include issues such as labor and workers' rights; the well-being of local communities; the well-being of animals in various management systems; food safety, nutrition and food security; air, soil and water quality; and energy conservation and reduction of waste.

The Global Roundtable for Sustainable Beef grew out of the first Global Conference on Sustainable Beef in November 2010; itself

the result of a process involving consultation and involvement of many beef value chain stakeholders.

"The conference involved more than 350 participants representing a wide range of regions and sectors of the beef industry," said Cameron Bruett, GRSB president, "from ranchers in North America, South America and Australia; to processors, retailers, government and nongovernment organizations all around the world."

Bruett also serves as the chief sustainability officer and head of corporate communications for JBS, the world's largest meat processor.

One of the products of the 2010 conference was a "Key Issues Framework" which sets out the issues identified by the participants as being of major importance to any initiative addressing sustainable beef. This framework is helping to guide the work of the Definition Committee.

The committee is expected to complete its work by late 2013, presenting results at the next Global Conference on Sustainable Beef slated for early 2014 in Brazil.

"Individuals with subject matter expertise in natural resources, animal well-being, efficiency and innovation, and other areas regarding beef sustainability are invited to be a part of the process," Weech reiterated. More information on the process is available at GRSBeef.org or inquiries may be made to information@grsbeef.org.

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