

# Cattlemen's Summer Conference

Cattlemen discuss current issues, set course for policy and checkoff efforts at the 2012 Cattle Industry Summer Conference.

**M**ore than 700 cattlemen gathered in Denver, Colo., July 25-28 to help create direction for cattle industry programs at the 2012 Cattle Industry Summer Conference. The event included meetings of the National Cattlemen's Beef Association (NCBA), Cattlemen's Beef Promotion and Research Board (CBB or Beef Board), American National CattleWomen Inc. (ANCW) and National Cattlemen's Foundation (NCF). Among the purposes of the yearly conference was to create a framework for both checkoff and policy efforts on behalf of U.S. cattle producers for the 2013 fiscal year, which for NCBA and the CBB begins Oct. 1.

The keynote speaker at Thursday's Opening General Session was Jay Lehr, a futurist in agriculture, who spoke on "Mega Trends in Agriculture: Implications for the Beef Industry." At Friday's general session, CattleFax Senior Market Analyst Kevin Good provided an overview of the cattle market and described how the drought is affecting the entire industry.

"This year's summer conference will provide a chance for producers to learn, as well as a chance to lead," said J.D. Alexander, NCBA president and a beef producer from Pilger, Neb., as the meeting kicked off. "This is definitely a working session at which important strategies for future action are developed."

Also during General Session II on Friday, W.D. Farr Scholarships were presented by the NCF to two graduate students. The \$12,000 scholarships are presented to students who want to further their educations to pursue careers in meat science and animal agriculture.

Joint committees and subcommittees met Friday to develop proposals for 2013 checkoff-funded research, education and promotion programs. NCBA policy committees also met to determine



PHOTOS BY KASEY MILLER

► "This year's summer conference will provide a chance for producers to learn, as well as a chance to lead," says J.D. Alexander, NCBA president and a beef producer from Pilger, Neb.

priorities and discuss strategies for the 2013 year. The NCBA Board convened a session on Saturday, as did members of the CBB.

"The challenges we face as an industry are sizeable, but our resolve to find solutions is equal to the task," said Alexander. "I'm proud so many of my fellow producers are joining me in Denver to tackle the work and help assure our potential for future success."

## Pay the Rent

Keynote speaker shares positive outlook on future of American agriculture.

by Kasey Miller

Organizations do a great job of defending the industry against activists, Jay Lehr, senior fellow and science director of the Heartland Institute, told audience members at the first general session of the 2012 Cattle Industry Summer Conference. However, industry members can't rely on those groups. He urged producers to spend two hours a month telling people — and not members of the industry — about the good things the industry does.

Lehr called this paying the rent for being a part of the greatest industry, the beef industry.

At 78, Lehr is an ironman triathlete — a

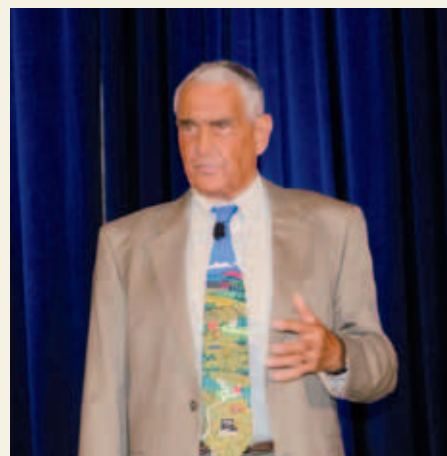
race, he said, in which vegans can't compete. He prepares for races by eating steak, and noted that a recent visit to a steak house in Denver found every seat full, signaling demand for beef and economic recovery.

"The only other voices consumers have heard in your lifetime have been from terrorist organizations like HSUS (Humane Society of the United States), PETA (People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals) and the general media reporting bad things," he says.

The object is to win back the public's hearts and minds, Lehr emphasized, and the good thing is that people are interested. Conversations just need to be started.

As an example, Lehr said antibiotics are a hot topic, but people don't know that the NCBA developed an antibiotic protocol in 1987 that advises producers to stay away from antibiotics used in human medicine, to use medications sparingly and to administer only to sick animals.

Lehr called denying antibiotics to animals that need it inhumane. Unfortunately, he said, people think antibiotics are used "willy-nilly."



► Jay Lehr urged producers to spend two hours a month telling people — not members of the industry — about the good things the industry does.

"We can only beat this problem — and we can beat it — if all of us get involved, and not just leave it to the leaders and the trade groups," he said.

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Despite the obstacles of drought, high corn prices and low margins, Lehr asserted that this is the golden age in agriculture. Meat intake will increase as world income increases and as biotechnology increases efficiency, he said.

If these obstacles had happened 15 years ago, producers wouldn't have been able to handle them as well as they can now, he said. In 15 years, they will be handled even better. Technology is finding more water in deeper wells and improving irrigation practices.

Lehr concluded with a quote by Admiral William Halsey: "There are no great men, just great challenges which ordinary men, out of necessity, are forced by circumstance to meet."

## House Tackles Death Tax, Senate Strays

Leaders look for permanent estate tax relief.

National Cattlemen's Beef Association (NCBA) Associate Director of Legislative Affairs Kent Bacus offered attendees of the 2012 Cattle Industry Summer Conference an update on recent movements in Washington, D.C., regarding the estate tax. This issue, said Bacus, is the No. 1 priority for NCBA. The issue rises to the top policy issue for family-owned small businesses, such as farms and ranches, because of the burden it places on families hoping to pass their business on to the next generation.

"The estate tax is a prime example of bad tax policy and Congress should repeal. Unfortunately, we hear from some elected leaders who claim to be defenders of the little guy. Meanwhile, they avoid opportunities to kill the death tax," said Bacus. "In order to sustain these family businesses, the future must contain a level of certainty. The next generation cannot possibly afford to take over the family business if they are taxed to death."

Bacus gave some good news to cattlemen seeking permanent relief from the estate tax. Bacus reported that Rep. Kevin Brady (R-Texas) has 218 co-sponsors on his Death Tax Repeal Permanency Act. This legislation would essentially provide full and permanent relief from the tax. Senator John Thune of South Dakota also introduced a companion bill — the Death Tax Repeal Permanency Act of 2012 — in his chamber, and that bill has 37 co-sponsors. They also released an updated study proving how

### Update: House votes to extend tax relief through 2013

The U.S. House of Representatives Aug. 1 voted to extend the current tax code for another year. This includes keeping the estate tax, known as the death tax, at its current level of 35% for estates worth more than \$5 million per individual and \$10 million per couple.

Even though full repeal of the death tax is the top priority for NCBA, Kent Bacus, associate director of legislative affairs, says the plan passed by the House Aug. 1 is a step in the right direction.

"The good news is that the House-passed tax package provides a continuation of current estate tax relief through 2013. NCBA encourages both the House and Senate to keep the estate tax provision in any final tax package," said Bacus.

If Congress fails to act by the end of 2012, the death tax will revert to a \$1 million exemption level at a 55% tax rate.

— release by NCBA

harmful and ineffective the death tax is from the Joint Economic Committee. Bacus said the study's key points are the estate tax

- ▶ continues to hurt the economy,
- ▶ fails as a revenue generator,
- ▶ creates a barrier to economic equality, and
- ▶ could increase revenue if it were abolished.

The bad news conveyed at the conference was the recent action taken by the Senate. The Senate voted on two tax packages the week of the conference that will be used for messaging purposes this election season. Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid (D-Nev.) led efforts to secure passage of a tax package that extends tax rates for family income up to \$250,000 for a year, raises the top rate on capital gains and dividends, as well as continue several targeted tax provisions. The Reid package, according to Bacus, does not address the estate tax and would leave small business owners and ranchers vulnerable to a reversion of the pre-2001 levels of a 55% tax on estates worth \$1 million or more. Bacus said this is unacceptable.

"Most farmers and ranchers would trip the \$1 million threshold on land values alone. Land values are through the roof and all of the assets it takes to operate a farm or ranch, including livestock, farm machinery

and more, would hit the majority of farm and ranch families throughout the country," said Bacus. "This is not a tax on the wealthy. We must find permanent relief or risk taking land out of production agriculture, threatening our ability to provide food for U.S. consumers and abroad."

Bacus said NCBA supports Rep. Brady and Sen. Thune in their quest to abolish the tax. Given the current political environment, however, NCBA would also support making the current tax levels of 35% on farms and ranchers valued at \$10 million per couple. Bacus said this tax level, which is set to expire on Dec. 31, 2012, misses the majority of farmers and ranchers.

— release by NCBA

## Animal Well-being and Advocacy in One

The ANCW Animal Well-Being Committee shares advocacy efforts.

by Kasey Miller

Telling the beef story is a major driver of the American National CattleWomen Inc. (ANCW) and its Animal Well-Being Committee. The committee has been busy with advocacy efforts that coincide with youth development, beef promotion and legislative action. Those activities were presented at the Cattle Industry Summer Conference in Denver.

The FFA career development event is a new public speaking contest geared toward "telling the beef story." The Arizona CowBelles partnered with FFA to create the contest. Suzanne Menges, committee chairwoman, said the contest "makes an impact from the local to the state level." Once 17 states start offering the contest, it can become a national contest. Menges recommended other state cattlemen's organizations partner with their state FFA advisors to offer the contest, which fulfills the organization's goal of partnering with other youth agricultural groups to promote the beef industry.

The students who participated in Arizona were awarded a check and a trip to Nashville for the 2012 Cattle Industry Convention and National Cattlemen's Beef Association (NCBA) Trade Show. Menges said this

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# 2011 NBQA Documents Improvement, Establishes Critical Benchmarks

Eating satisfaction, product integrity and telling the industry's story are seen as key to industry's future.

While the beef industry continues to make progress in the area of beef quality, there is still room for improvement. That's the overarching conclusion of the 2011 checkoff-funded National Beef Quality Audit (NBQA) released during a session at the 2012 Cattle Industry Summer Conference in Denver.

The 2011 NBQA results show that the industry has made significant improvements in producing safe and wholesome beef that is consistently higher in quality, as proven by several measurable standards. Still, the three-phase checkoff-funded research, which took nearly a full year to complete and examined all facets of beef production, found there were several aspects — many associated with channel communication and consumer trust — on which the industry should strive to continue improving.

"The National Beef Quality Audit, conducted every five years, has always been the gold standard by which problems in the beef production chain have been identified for the past two decades," says John Maas, veterinarian and specialist in cooperative extension at the University of California–Davis, and chairman of the checkoff's Joint Producer Education Committee. "There have been a lot of important issues identified by past audits, and some major industry solutions, such as the development of Beef Quality Assurance (BQA) protocols, came about as a means of correcting those issues."

Maas notes that the 2011 NBQA, a comprehensive examination of cow-calf, stocker, feedlot, packing and retail segments, showed significant progress in areas such as animal handling and attention to final product quality during the last 20 years. Since the first audit in 1991, in fact, adherence to BQA protocols has helped the industry reduce carcass blemishes, injection-site lesions and similar quality defects identified in early audits.

A shifting consumer landscape means that the beef industry faces a moving target with regard to meeting consumer demands and Maas says the 2011 NBQA includes important messages for each of the five

industry segments surveyed. Specifically, he says, every sector needs to be aware that their production practices can and do have a major impact on the finished beef product.

"Consumers need to be assured that the industry is doing everything it can on its own, with its own funding to make sure we're providing one of the best protein products in the world," says Maas. That point

was echoed by Craig Uden, vice chair of the Beef Promotion Operating Committee and producer from Elwood, Neb.

"The beef business has made tremendous progress in its efforts to provide consumers with a safe, wholesome and nutritious product that continues to exceed consumer expectations," says Uden. "That hasn't been an easy task because consumer expectations and market demand are undergoing constant change, and it can take cattlemen and women a long time to react to market signals after they receive them."

Despite continuous improvement, the audit also found new areas that challenge quality and consumer perceptions of beef. Consumers are beginning to ask more questions about where their food comes from and how it is produced, and beef is no exception to that trend. The NBQA results clearly verify that fact.

"It's clear we need to do a better job of telling our story — the story of beef production," says Uden. "We need to be transparent about our methods, not just with consumers but also with each other. It's important that we do a better job of sharing information between production segments and ensuring that market signals — the correct market signals — are being transmitted up and down the production chain. These results and the benchmarks we are measuring provide us the tools and framework we need to do just that."

Barriers to progress identified in the NBQA Executive Summary were:

- ▶ Low level of written protocols
- ▶ Balancing needs of all industry segments



## Pillars of Beef Chain Success

### Moving the Industry Forward

The National Beef Quality Audit (NBQA) was initiated in 1991, and every five years since has provided guidelines for improving the U.S. beef supply. Early audits focused on physical attributes of beef and beef by-products, such as marbling, external fat, carcass weight and carcass blemishes.

Results from the early audits were impressive. Excess fat, revealed as an issue in the 1991 NBQA, has been removed. Injection site lesions were drastically reduced, and progress in the reduction of other defects has also been achieved. It's obvious that when cattlemen and other beef producers know about challenges that reduce profitability and limit progress, they step up.

Over the past 20 years, however, the landscape of the industry — and of society — has changed dramatically. The changes in cattle and beef markets, in eating patterns, in consumer attitudes, and more were considered as phases of the 2011 NBQA were being developed, as the research was conducted, and as researchers and study participants reviewed the resulting data.

#### Quality Challenges

(Based on survey responses, 06/11 to 07/11)

2011	1992	2000	2007	2011
External Fat	Overall Consistency	Carcass Weights	Injectability	Food Safety
Lean Fat	Overall Consistency	Injectability	Overall Consistency	Injectability
Overall Consistency	Injectability	Injectability	Injectability	Injectability
Injectability	Injectability	Injectability	Injectability	Injectability
Injectability	Injectability	Injectability	Injectability	Injectability
Injectability	Injectability	Injectability	Injectability	Injectability
Injectability	Injectability	Injectability	Injectability	Injectability
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Injectability	Injectability	Injectability	Injectability	Injectability
Injectability	Injectability	Injectability	Injectability	Injectability

Source: NBQA

Funded by The Beef Checkoff

- ▶ Lack of trust between industry segments
- ▶ Disconnect with dairy
- ▶ Carcass inconsistency
- ▶ No common language
- ▶ Potential food safety issues
- ▶ Poor story-telling

The three phases of the research included extensive face-to-face interviews of representatives in all beef supply chain segments; expanded cooler and plant data that incorporates camera grading from nearly 2.5 million carcasses in 17 federally inspected plants owned by four beef processing companies; and a pilot survey to evaluate quality indicators in preharvest segments of the industry. Results from the research were at the heart of discussions during an NBQA strategy workshop in April.

For more information on the 2011 NBQA, see "Outside the Box" on page 276 and "Pillars of Beef Chain Success" on page 278 in this issue. To obtain a copy of the 2011 NBQA Executive Summary, visit [www.bqa.org/audit.aspx](http://www.bqa.org/audit.aspx) or contact Melissa Slagle at 402-856-2097 or Diane Henderson at 303-867-6302.

For more information about your beef checkoff investment, visit [MyBeefCheckoff.com](http://MyBeefCheckoff.com).



**Editor's Note:** This article was provided as a news release by the Cattlemen's Beef Promotion and Research Board.

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provided incentive for participation, but it also gave the students more opportunities to present their speech.

Menges said the speaking contest is good preparation for the National Beef Ambassador Program because the students already have a presentation about the beef industry and speaking skills. More information about the contest is available online at [www.ancw.org](http://www.ancw.org).



PHOTOS BY KASEY MILLER

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The committee also reported on the National Beef Speakers Bureau, which is composed of 22 trained speakers across the country. The bureau's first goal is to reach 10,000 meal-time decision-makers and youth, and to gain pre- and post-presentation assessments about opinions of beef. The bureau has reached almost half of its goal and has seen a 14.1% positive shift in attitude toward beef. Menges said 3%-5% is normally considered good, so 14% is very successful. Twenty-eight percent of the consumers say the positives of beef outweigh the negatives.

The bureau's second goal is to complete two events with women's organizations with at least 200 in attendance. The "Kids in the Kitchen" event with a Junior League in Colorado reached 1,184 kids and parents. The second event, "Family Fun Fest" in California, also partnered with the Junior League, reached 800 kids and parents. Untapped resources for speaking engagements are still being sought.

Speaker development workshops and webinars train speaker volunteers, and many resources are available to speakers. Volunteers wishing to join the bureau must be Beef Quality Assurance (BQA)-certified

and have completed the Masters of Beef Advocacy (MBA) program.

Some committee members were trained in advocacy by the U.S. Farmers and Ranchers Alliance. Andrea Hutchison shared some tips that consumers most want to hear about environmental care, animal care, food safety, genetically modified organisms (GMOs) and antibiotics.

"We're at war. Telling our story is one of the battles, but there are a lot of battles before we win the war," she said. Hutchison has posted what she has learned about advocacy through experience and research on her blogs [agvoicesunited.blogspot.com](http://agvoicesunited.blogspot.com) and [animalagarmed.blogspot.com](http://animalagarmed.blogspot.com).



## ANCW Taking Beef to the Classroom

by Kasey Miller

Young people will be tomorrow's consumers and beef producers, and the American National CattleWomen Inc. (ANCW) Education Curriculum Committee is working to increase beef's presence in the classroom.

Committee co-chair Rebecca Been said a stronger cattlegirl presence is needed in the national Agriculture in the Classroom program. Much of the current curriculum is centered on garden education. More effort needs to be made to educate school children about production agriculture.

"They need enough industry people to link the gardening curriculum back to production agriculture," she said.

Project Food, Land and People (FLP), a widely used program for elementary and secondary students to learn about

agriculture, is developing curriculum to educate students about animal agriculture. The goal is to combat the misconceptions the Humane Society of the United States (HSUS), People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals (PETA) and the general media broadcast. The lessons will focus on six areas: food safety, animal safety, genetics and animal welfare, nutrition and the importance of protein, animal and ruminant digestion, and advertising and the misconceptions of animal agriculture.

FLP asked ANCW for input on common misconceptions so it could start developing curriculum and for advice on experts to review the curriculum once it is developed for the teacher pilot program for 2013.

Another project is the creation of a beef production book geared toward young students. Been met with the authors of the project and was asked to provide a nationwide view of cattle production. It is hoped that the books will be out in January.

ANCW is producing toolkits as an online resource for cattlegirls for projects to promote the beef industry, "so as not to reinvent the wheel," explained Been. The committee was charged to create two toolkits before the year ends. The first will be a reading-in-the-classroom toolkit.

The idea is that, to most cattlegirls, reading to a class is less intimidating than presenting for a set period of time. The toolkit would provide a sample letter to teachers, a book list, prop ideas, costs, materials needed, discussion questions and also a discussion geared for teachers if a cattlegirl can't present the information.

"These will help ensure success, because when a cattlegirl has a better first experience, she's more likely to continue presenting to classrooms," Been added.

The second toolkit, presented by co-chair Barbara Jacques, was an Earth Day toolkit. It centered on the book *Amazing Grazing* by Cris Peterson and ruminant activities provided by the Cattlemen's Beef Board. A Cow Chow video and interactive quiz go along with the book. With the cost of mailing materials, she said these supplemental materials have the potential to be emailed, making it easier and more cost-effective to reach teachers.

Until the toolkit is finished and posted at [www.ancw.org](http://www.ancw.org), Jacques said that she can email it to members. The book is available on [Amazon.com](http://Amazon.com) for less than \$10, and the Cow Chow video is available at [www.ExploreBeef.org/CowChow](http://www.ExploreBeef.org/CowChow).

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# Market Still Positive

Story & photo by *Kasey Miller*

**T**he drought last year was devastating, but the drought this year has hit the Corn Belt and is more widespread, Kevin Good, senior market analyst for CattleFax told participants of the second general session at the 2012 Cattle Industry Summer Conference.

Last year 65% of the country was in moderate drought. This year, that has increased to 70%, and the extreme to exceptional drought percentage is up to 27%, Good said. With 70% of the U.S. cattle inventory located in regions of drought, beef producers are trying to salvage and allocate their resources.

Citing CattleFax

meteorologist Art Douglas, Good said the El Niño weather pattern is bringing the southern third of the country more rain, but not enough to save the corn and pasture for the remainder of this growing season. Pastures are already at the worst level in the last 15 years, with growing conditions for the rest of the summer remaining to be seen.

This year, cattle-on-feed inventories have risen about 3% in feedyards with capacities greater than 1,000 head, though marketing is still down about 2%-4%. Feedyards with capacities less than 1,000 head are reporting lower inventories due to higher corn prices. Good predicted the smaller farmer-feeder

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► “Based on Omaha corn prices, the lack of rain and intense heat will keep corn prices in the \$6.50-\$8.00 range for the foreseeable future,” noted Kevin Good, senior market analyst for CattleFax.

operations would bypass feeding cattle this year and just sell the corn.

“Based on Omaha corn prices, the lack of rain and intense heat will keep corn prices in the \$6.50-\$8.00 range for the foreseeable future,” noted Good.

Because their diet is a higher percentage of corn, the higher corn prices are affecting the pork and poultry industries more than the beef industry, which means there will be less supply of competing proteins. All three proteins are exporting more, and with higher input costs causing lower supplies, price in the export market has gone up.

Exports have still been on the rise (at a lower rate), Good said, but so have imports. The dollar has strengthened, and the lean, finely textured beef (LFTB) issue has created need to import more lean trim.

The beef cow herd inventory is still declining, down another half million this year, and the drought is affecting the rate of

liquidation, Good explained.

“The U.S. calf crop is down 800,000 head,” he said. “Bottom line, when all is said and done, the cattle herd will decrease by about 500,000 head. This is compared to a 900,000 decrease a year ago. So, we are seeing a liquidation, but at a slower pace than last year.”

If Mother Nature cooperates, the liquidation should slow next year, he said, and expansion could begin within a couple of years. This means that production is tighter, and prices are supported because of the reduced supply.

Despite the obvious challenges facing America’s cattlemen and women, Good offered reason for optimism. Wholesale beef demand has gone up 5% from last year. Prices have gone up from recession years, there is better foodservice business and there is more retail exposure. Retailers have kept middle cuts at high prices and have widened the Choice-Select spread. Restaurant performance is in an expansion phase, though that has slowed slightly in May and June.

Prices are extremely friendly for beef and other proteins, Good noted, citing as an example the \$80-per-hundredweight (cwt.) average price for utility cows, feeder-calf prices at \$188 per cwt., and yearling prices at \$168 per cwt.

“I know with the drought it seems pretty rough, but if you stand back and look at the longer view, we can be optimistic of where we’re going in the next few years,” he posits.



## Cattlemen given signal to ‘hang tough’

As consumers continue to demand nutritious beef, cattlemen are given reason to remain in the cattle business and avoid liquidation. National Cattlemen’s Beef Association (NCBA) CEO Forrest Roberts said the challenges cattlemen are facing are serious, but NCBA is encouraging them to trust the market signals and maintain cow herds if possible.

“The thing we have to remember is that

consumers continue to prefer beef on the dinner table. Consumers are sending very clear signs to cattlemen to hang tough and continue producing the protein they prefer most,” said Roberts. “There is no doubt this will be tough. But cattlemen are tough people, and I am confident we will weather this storm and rebuild the U.S. cow herd once weather conditions improve.”

— excerpt from NCBA release

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► Education Curriculum Committee co-chairs Barbara Jacques (left) and Rebecca Been explain the two toolkits that will be available to aid cattlemen in bringing beef to the classroom. "These will help ensure success, because when a cattlemaster has a better first experience, she's more likely to continue presenting to classrooms," says Been.

Author Karen Kelling presented her book *The Comanchero's Grave*, a mystery-adventure novel for young girls with an underlying message of how hard the death tax makes passing on a family ranch. At the 2013 winter meeting in February in Tampa, Fla., ANCW plans to have an agricultural book boutique that can "expose books written by those from the inside" to the projected 6,000 trade show attendees, Kelling explained.

## Emerging Health Research, Issues

Schmallenberg virus, low-stress weaning and pulmonary disease are three of the issues discussed.

by Kasey Miller

New viruses, alternate weaning strategies and new thoughts on pulmonary hypertension in cattle were all topics of discussion at the National Cattlemen's Beef Association (NCBA) Emerging Health Research and Issues Working Group.

**Schmallenberg virus.** Julia Ridpath, research microbiologist at USDA Agricultural Research Services' Ruminant Diseases and Immunology Research Unit

National Animal Disease Center, described the new Schmallenberg virus (SBV) and how it was discovered.

In August to October 2011, there was an outbreak of disease in adult cattle, mostly dairy, reported in the Netherlands and Germany. The cattle exhibited signs of mild to moderate fever, reduced milk yield, loss of appetite, loss of body condition and diarrhea.

In November and December 2011, abortion and stillbirths were associated with fetal central nervous system abnormalities. The disease was affecting mainly sheep, but it was present in cattle and goats. It was in the Netherlands, Germany and Belgium at this point.

In January 2012, abortion and stillbirths associated with fetal abnormalities in cattle were reported in the same countries.

The virus was identified by a metagenomics approach, Ridpath explained. Researchers compared DNA and RNA isolated from clinically ill dairy cattle to normal cattle in the German outbreak. The virus, she explained, is carried by insects and presents in adult cattle with symptoms similar to heat stress, but with added diarrhea. Newborns are delivered at or near term, but are malformed and have symptoms similar to central nervous system abnormalities. The virus spread to 4,000 farms within six months.

## Support of Checkoff remains high

*Backing continues despite current pressures on industry.*

Support for the Beef Checkoff remains high, despite weather and economic pressures facing the industry, according to a recent survey of U.S. beef and dairy producers. Checkoff support, at 74% — about even with January 2012 findings — remains at historic highs.



The nationwide survey of 900 beef and dairy producers conducted by the independent firm Aspen Media & Market Research in late June and early July 2012 found that an overwhelming majority of beef and dairy producers continue to believe that their Beef Checkoff has value for them in many ways:

Eight out of 10 producers say the Beef Checkoff has helped to contribute to a positive trend in beef demand.

Seven out of 10 producers say the Beef Checkoff contributes to the profitability of their operations, is there for them in a crisis, and represents their interests.

Two in three beef producers believe the checkoff is well-managed.

"Despite being challenged by drought, economic uncertainty and groups that would like to see us go out of business, beef and dairy producers continue to see more in their Beef Checkoff Program than just paying for a few ads or a few promotions," says Joint Producer Communications Committee (JPCC) Chairman Hank Maxey Jr., a producer from Chatham, Va. "I'm one of the seven out of 10 who have seen that the checkoff 'has helped contribute to the profitability' of our own operations."

According to the survey, Maxey continues, "the beef checkoff has, for nearly 26 years, served the beef industry with programs producers want and that we see as working for us to 'contribute to a positive trend in consumer demand for beef.'"

One of the key priorities of the checkoff committee Maxey chairs is to "increase the understanding of how the checkoff works ... how [it] benefits them and their role as stakeholders," he notes.

"It's an increasingly competitive world, and for beef producers to continue to succeed we have to be able to not only produce a safe, healthful and sustainable product, we have to promote its benefits in this country and worldwide. We can only do this by working together through the Beef Checkoff," he says.

A copy of the research report is available online.

— release by CBB

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# Beef Consumer Insights

Millennials are focus of new checkoff-funded consumer research.

Story & photo by Kasey Miller

**Y**ou might be a millennial if you sleep with your phone in or next to your bed,” noted Rick McCarty, vice president of issue analysis and strategy for the National Cattlemen’s Beef Association (NCBA). While this does sound a bit like Jeff Foxworthy’s “You might be a redneck,” the statement can be substantiated with data.

Eighty-three percent of millennials are so connected to their cell phone that they sleep with it next to them, according to a 2011 Pew Research Institute study. That’s important because millennials are the next big generation of beef consumers, and marketing to them is a whole different beast than marketing to other generations.

Millennials are taken into consideration in two core strategies of the Beef Industry Long-range Plan — improve domestic consumer preference for beef and strengthen the image of beef and the beef industry, said John Lundeen, senior executive director of market research at NCBA.

To provide a benchmark measure called for in the long-range plan, the Consumer Image Index (CII) study of 1,205 consumers was conducted online in January 2012. The intent of the checkoff-funded research was to establish a benchmark of public perceptions of beef and the beef industry.

About 75% of survey respondents said beef positives either strongly or somewhat strongly outweighed negatives, noted Lundeen. Moderate beef eaters (eat beef one to two times a week) represent 42% of all consumers. Moderates are a marketing target because they are the consumers most likely to add at least one more beef meal a week.

Studies showed that moderates have some cognitive dissonance when it comes to animal welfare, McCarty said, citing as an example that while 76% approve of the end beef product, only 59% approve of beef production. Part of that dissonance is their perception of beef production. When shown images of cattle and pastures, consumers indicated they didn’t believe them to be true reflections of the beef industry; whereas images of feedlots, feedbunks and a syringe were considered reflective of the beef industry.

When asked their comfort level with specific antibiotic uses, consumers showed comfort with treating sick animals when prescribed by a veterinarian and in accordance with Food and Drug Administration (FDA)



► John Lundeen (left), NCBA executive director of market research, and Rick McCarty, vice president of issues analysis and strategy, explain that consumers choose beef because of taste, safety, value and consistency. Limiters to consumption include price, nutrition, inconvenience and quality/safety concerns.

regulations. There were many who indicated they were neutral about the entire antibiotics issue, but a surprisingly low number said that they are never comfortable with the use of antibiotics, McCarty said. The more antibiotics were explained, the more comfortable the consumers indicated they were with their use.

Many advances in science and technology received consumer approval, McCarty shared, especially if the technology improved food safety or care and comfort of animals, or optimized diet and nutrition and environmental efficiency.

Consumers said they choose beef because of its taste, safety, value and consistency, though price is starting to be an issue. Beef Quality Assurance (BQA) has improved consistency, and Lundeen said that is a story that needs to be shared.

The biggest limiters to beef consumption, said McCarty, are:

- price — at both restaurants and grocery stores;
- nutrition — believing chicken and seafood are healthier or that beef can’t be eaten every day;
- preparation — it can’t be cooked in the microwave; and
- quality and safety — citing lean, finely textured beef and the belief that cattle are pumped full of hormones and antibiotics.

Many of these limitations are based on

**Eighty-three percent of millennials are so connected to their cell phone that they sleep with it next to them, according to a 2011 Pew Research Institute study.**

misperceptions. The solution, Lundeen said, is sharing true information. Many consumer opinions change, he said, after talking to ranchers and farmers.

To keep value from being a limiter, he said, “We need to think about portion size; it’s something that resonates with consumers.”

Specific nutrition facts do more good in messaging, said Wendy Neuman, NCBA director of market research. Just concentrating on lean messaging isn’t as effective, she adds. Consumers want to know the specific nutritional benefits of eating beef.

Safety perceptions are more positive, said McCarty, but there is still work to be done. Consumers are most concerned with *E. coli*, but food safety experts at the Beef Industry Safety Summit said salmonella is most concerning because it is harder to eliminate.

More details are available online at [beefresearch.org](http://beefresearch.org), following the Market Research tab.



**Cattlemen's Summer Conference** CONTINUED FROM PAGE 286

The virus is known to now exist only in Europe, but knowledge of the disease is important, Ridpath warned.

**Weaning performance.** Terry Swecker, associate department head and professor at Virginia-Maryland Regional College of Veterinary Medicine at Virginia Tech, explained that by looking at behavior, some stressors could be reduced to improve performance of calves at weaning. Swecker reported on differences observed between groups of calves weaned "cold-turkey" (the control), weaned with fenceline weaning and weaned using nose clips. The research showed that calves weaned with nose clips didn't eat as much the week before separation, while the fenceline calves started grazing because they couldn't suck.

Once separated, all three groups didn't eat much, but the control group spent less time eating and more than double the time walking, which uses energy and calories. By Day 42, all the growth had evened out. When looking at non-esterified fatty acids (NEFAs) metabolic parameters (which look at the negative energy balance), the nose-clip calves exhibited more NEFA, which means they didn't gain as well. The immune function of the calves, measured by oxidative enzymes, did not differ by weaning method. To avoid added stress of taking blood, cortisol levels were measured in the feces, and fenceline-weaned calves were the least stressed.

**Pulmonary hypertension.** Professor Frank Garry, and doctoral candidate Joe Neary, both at Colorado State University, presented some new thoughts on pulmonary hypertension and high-altitude, or brisket, disease. High-altitude disease typically causes increased stress on the lungs and heart, and thus, calves have an increase in pulmonary arterial pressure (PAP). Essentially, reduced vessel diameter and increased pressure cause the issues.

Garry says that many feedlot cattle are experiencing issues similar to high-altitude disease, even at lower elevations. This is potentially because cattle have been bred to be too large for their heart and lung capacity. Cattle do not use air as efficiently as horses or other athletes, so they need larger lungs. Calves that do not get enough air are essentially hyperventilating, thus they are more prone to disease.

Other risk factors include oxygen demand, altitude, fluctuating temperatures, sex, stress and unknown breed effects.

Therefore, greater demand on the cardiopulmonary system results in pulmonary disease, cardiac failure and limited growth.

He says he hopes to show that lower-altitude cattle can be improved by crossing with adapted high-altitude cattle to increase lung capacity. Ultimately, "animals that can deliver more oxygen grow better," Garry concluded.

## Consumer Trends Continue to Change

Understanding those trends helps industry create new products, recipes.

by *Melissa Slagle, Cattlemen's Beef Board*

Given the changing nature of availability of foods and preferences, the beef checkoff has been tracking consumer consumption patterns to better understand preparation methods and flavors used in beef preparation.

"One of the interesting factors I found is that from 2002 to 2012, more people are eating beef steaks in that medium-rare to medium range, which pleases me because I know that's where you're going to get that best beef-eating experience," said NCBA Executive Chef Dave Zino, who explained more about consumer trends and what the 2012 research data show. "More people are eating ground beef in burgers at 160° and above, which also pleases me because we know that all bacteria is eliminated at 160°. So throughout the years I think we've seen some really positive changes."

Zino says overall, a variety of different ethnic foods have become more popular since 2005.

"American or local food is still the most popular, followed by Italian then Mexican," he said, adding, though, that Vietnamese and Japanese foods had seen jumps in popularity. "Every ethnic category, there was a jump in liking, and what that tells me is that I think people are a little more food savvy now."

It's important for the beef checkoff to develop a better understanding of consumer preferences, said Zino.

"There's no sense in doing research like this unless you follow it," he explained. "It really helps us kind of hone in on the recipes

and the new products that we're developing for consumers."

— release by CBB

## Outstanding Promoter, Educator

ANCW honors two of its own for outstanding advocacy, education efforts.

Two American National CattleWomen Inc. (ANCW) members were recently recognized for their outstanding volunteer efforts at the 2012 Cattle Industry Summer Conference. Kathryn Malcolm-Callis of Clayton, N.M., was named 2012 Outstanding Promoter of the Year. Melanie Fowle, Etna, Calif., was named 2012 Outstanding Educator of the Year.

Malcolm-Callis has presented *Kids, Kows and More* programs for seven years. This highly acclaimed program explains to third and fourth graders the ranching story, including land use and feed from birth to harvest, how 97% of the animal is used and the nutrients that beef provides. She speaks to about 100 students and 60 teachers each year.

In her position as a research specialist at the Clayton Livestock Research Center, Clayton, N.M., she has given tours and presentations to many children and other visitors. She has coordinated the New Mexico state fair booth, organizing more than 100 CowBelle volunteers, and the state capitol education booth. She has provided book lists and informational columns to ANCW, and she has spoken to Rotary, Kiwanis and Lions Clubs on cattle nutrition, the benefits of beef and its role in a healthy lifestyle.

According to Dina Chacon-Reitzel, executive director of the New Mexico Beef Council, "Kathryn participated in every beef council meeting when she served as CowBelle president, admirably representing CowBelles, providing thoughtful input on beef promotion and educational programs."

Because California CattleWomen keep records of their outreach, Melanie Fowle can demonstrate her personal touch to more than 3,000 students. A teacher by profession, she has taught hundreds of California CattleWomen beef promotion presentations for them to share to hundreds more children. She served on the committee that



planned the 25th Anniversary of California Ag in the Classroom, coordinating 300 volunteers to present to 10,000 San Francisco students.

Fowle says CattleWomen need to “continually move out of their comfort zone to reach today’s consumers.” Under her direction, the California CattleWomen undertook two booths at two new venues (Fish and Game and World Ag Expo) this year, putting important beef industry facts and faces in front of professionals, consumers and children.”

Kellie Hargett, agriculture instructor at Etna High School, Etna, Calif., says, “Mrs. Fowle presents beef information to ag business students to take on the challenge of the Beef Ambassador contest. She helps coach and organize candidates. She also leads an education day each year where fourth graders are mentored by local high school FFA students.”

“Melanie has a natural ability to teach and transform situations into teachable moments,” according to Christie Van Egmond, manager of channel marketing for the California Beef Council. “Her enthusiasm truly drives her beef education efforts.”

Fellow CattleWomen nominate candidates and the ANCW Beef Education and Curriculum Committee chooses the Educator of the Year, the ANCW Consumer Promotion and Education Committee chooses the Promoter of the Year. The awards are given annually at the Cattle Industry Summer Conference.

— release by ANCW

## Farr Scholarships Presented

2012 W.D. Farr Scholarships presented to students in animal science, the environment.

Two graduate students, one studying animal science and the other agricultural water management, received the 2012 W.D. Farr Scholarships from the National Cattlemen’s Foundation (NCF). The \$12,000 awards recognize superior achievements in academics and leadership and will allow the students to further their study in fields that benefit the cattle and beef industry. The presentation was made at the 2012 Cattle Industry Summer Conference.



► **Curtis Pittman** of Glenford, Ohio, is a doctoral candidate in animal science at Colorado State University.

**Curtis Pittman** of Glenford, Ohio, is a doctoral candidate in animal science at Colorado State University (CSU). Pittman received his bachelor’s degree in animal science from Ohio State University (OSU) and his master’s degree in animal science from CSU. He expects to receive his doctorate in December 2013.

Pittman has managed the CSU Meat Science Laboratory and has been a CSU graduate teaching assistant since August 2010. He has completed five research projects at CSU, where his master’s thesis was on the “Validation and Evaluation of Commercially Available Compounds for use as Beef and Pork Antimicrobial Interventions.”

The recipient of numerous awards during his academic career, Pittman was on the Dean’s List at both CSU and OSU, and was the Student Leadership Committee Chair of the American Meat Science Association. His career goal is to share his passion for meat science with following generations through academics, and engage in research that enhances the wholesomeness and eating experience of fresh meat products through improved cattle management strategies and postharvest interventions.

**Jenna Rodriguez** of Linden, Calif., is a doctoral candidate in hydrologic sciences at the University of California–Davis. Rodriguez received her bachelor’s degree in environmental science from UCLA, and her master’s in hydrologic sciences from UC–Davis. Her master’s project involved research of irrigation techniques in the San Joaquin Valley of California.

Among Rodriguez’s interests are applying remote sensing and satellite imagery analyses

in agriculture environments and forage crops to better manage irrigation. Her career goals include helping position the industry to better address drought crises, preserve the legacy of soil and water quality essential to agricultural, and champion environmental stewardship through responsible use of irrigation water.

Rodriguez grew up on an alfalfa farm and drove cattle with her grandfather, which she said helped establish her passion to explore agricultural irrigation in new and different ways. In a letter of support, one of her instructors said Rodriguez “is one of those rare individuals who is not only ambitious as a scientist, but also has a clear understanding that the purpose of her career is to bring the virtues of compassion and sacrifice to bear on societal problems related to water in agriculture.”



► **Jenna Rodriguez** of Linden, Calif., is a doctoral candidate in hydrologic sciences at the University of California–Davis.

The annual W.D. Farr Scholarship awards were established by the NCF in 2007 to recognize outstanding students who plan to pursue careers in meat science and animal agriculture. W.D. Farr was the first president of the National Cattlemen’s Foundation, and served as president of the American National Cattlemen’s Association, which would later become the National Cattlemen’s Beef Association. His career spanned 75 years and included innovations in cattle feeding, uniform beef grading, water conservation and banking. Farr died at age 97 in August 2007.

— release by NCF



# Stewards of the Land

Cattle ranchers honored for outstanding environmental stewardship.

Cattlemen and women from across the country were recognized for their commitment to environmental stewardship during an awards ceremony for the National Cattlemen's Beef Association (NCBA) Environmental Stewardship Award Program (ESAP).

Now in its 22nd year, ESAP was created to recognize beef producers who make environmental stewardship a priority on their farms and ranches while they also improve production and profitability. The Environmental Stewardship Award annually recognizes the outstanding stewardship practices and conservation achievements of U.S. cattle producers from across the nation. Regional and national award winners have been commended for their commitment to protecting the environment and improving fish and wildlife habitats while operating profitable cattle operations. The common trait among all winners is the desire to leave the land in better shape for future generations while also inspiring the next generation of land stewards.

"The environment and conserving natural resources are of high importance to cattlemen and women, because these resources directly affect their bottom line," said John Wallace, representative of Dow AgroSciences, which sponsors the program. "Also, education is one of the most important components of this program. By conducting education summits and workshops, it allows producers to tell their stories and learn new opportunities to be green."

During the Cattle Industry Summer Conference, seven regional Environmental Stewardship Awards were presented: 77 Ranch, Blooming Grove, Texas; Bold Ranch, Winifred, Mont.; Circle Square Ranch, Ocala, Fla.; Funk Farms Trust, Shirley, Ill.; Glenowen Farm, Round Hill, Va.; Slovek Ranch, Philip, S.D.; and Sparrowk Livestock, Clements, Calif.

## 77 Ranch

Owned by Gary and Sue Price, 77 Ranch of Blooming Grove, Texas, is the Region IV ESAP award winner. Located approximately 50 miles from the Dallas-Fort Worth metropolitan area, 77 Ranch has been in operation since 1976.

Its conservation and restoration work has been recognized by state and professional agencies through such awards as the Outstanding Rangeland Steward

Award from the Texas Section Society for Range Management, the Texas and Southwestern Cattle Raisers Association, the Leopold Conservation Award for Texas from Sand County Foundation, and the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department (TPWD).

The enterprises at 77 Ranch include wetland and water development; wildlife management, restoration and leasing for bass fishing, waterfowl and upland bird hunting; quail habitat restoration; turkey population restoration; and harvesting nuts from 150 native pecans.

Wildlife management has focused on bobwhite quail and efforts have centered on habitat management. Involvement in the Western Navarro Bobwhite Restoration Initiative has provided the opportunity to implement landscape scale population monitoring with annual spring call counts and a quail nest depredation project. Water quality has been optimized by the conversion of cropland to wetland. These areas were established in wetland plant species for the primary use of waterfowl. This has minimized sediment loading, erosion and other water quality issues.

The effectiveness of the conservation and restoration work at 77 Ranch has been proven by the trial of the drought of 2011. In a year when all of Texas was in historic drought and when ranchers reduced or completely destocked herds and trucked in hay and water, the Price family was able to

sustain their entire herd with their available forage and water resources.

"Gary and Sue Price are consummate land stewards who lead by example. They 'walk the walk' and 'talk the talk' to everyone young and old," said Carter Smith, executive director of the TPWD. "Their passion is for helping people of all ages understand how to read the land, how plants grow, why plant and animal diversity is important and how working livestock producers who practice good stewardship protect natural resources important to all Texans."

Gary and Sue Price are affiliate members of the American Angus Association.



► Bold Ranch, owned by Robert and Annette Bold of Winifred, Mont., is the Region V ESAP award winner.

## Bold Ranch

Bold Ranch, owned by Robert and Annette Bold of Winifred, Mont., is the Region V ESAP award winner.

Nominated by the Montana Stockgrowers Association (MSGA), Robert and Annette Bold have engineered significant environmental improvement and productivity gains since 1979. Their diversified operation includes cattle grazing on native rangeland, no-till crop production and a cattle-feeding operation.

The Bolds' commitment to environmental stewardship and enhancing the natural resources on their land includes a soil reclamation project, implementing no-till farming practices to decrease erosion, improving water resources to distribute livestock more evenly and protecting streams on their land.

In order to improve the environmental quality of their operation, the Bolds have worked closely with the MSGA, Central Montana Extension Service, Bureau of Land Management (BLM), Montana Department of State Lands and other organizations. Through collaborating



PHOTOS COURTESY ESAP

► Owned by Gary and Sue Price, 77 Ranch of Blooming Grove, Texas, is the Region IV ESAP award winner.

with these organizations, the Bolds have implemented conservation and stewardship measures such as converting saline seep lands into productive winter and fall grazing lands, developing a significant resident elk herd on their property and enhancing riparian areas and watersheds for long-term sustainability.

“The work of the Bold family demonstrates the positive impact that environmental consciousness can play in the sustainability of a ranching operation, as well as the health and well-being of the landscape, wildlife populations and local communities,” said Ariel Overstreet, director of communications for the MSGA.

Bold Ranch is an affiliate member of the American Angus Association.



► Circle Square Ranch, managed by E.L. Strickland of Ocala, Fla., is the Region II ESAP award winner.

### Circle Square Ranch

Circle Square Ranch, managed by E.L. Strickland of Ocala, Fla., is the Region II ESAP award winner.

According to the numerous organizations that nominated Circle Square Ranch, Strickland firmly believes in taking strong leadership steps to set a favorable example to the environmental community. The land provides refuge for wildlife, both protected and endangered species, and serves as a habitat for several plants and grass species.

Strickland, who has managed Circle Square Ranch for 37 years, believes that ranchers should be proactive in implementing good conservation and good business sense practices. Under Strickland's management, Circle Square Ranch excels in cattle production, growing forage crops, water quality, low environmental impact, wildlife habitat and establishing ranchers as good neighbors. All areas of Circle Square Ranch are available for passive or active recreation. In addition to walking and hiking, visitors to the ranch can enjoy photography and bird watching.

The ranch also conducts regular prescribed burns, which mimic natural fire frequency. Controlled burns set back plant succession, return nutrients to soil, reduce

the risk of wildfire and create a diverse habitat that encourages plant diversity for many wildlife species.

“E.L. Strickland and Circle Square Ranch have consistently accomplished the demanding goals of operating a successful cow-calf operation while consistently setting an outstanding example of environmental stewardship,” said David Fisk, P.G., in a recommendation letter by the St. John's River Water Management District. “The ranch maintains significant wildlife value through practices such as retaining areas of native vegetation and forage for wildlife, practicing sustainable silviculture and integrating monitoring of endangered and protected species that call the ranch home.”

### Funk Farms Trust

Funk Farms Trust, located in Shirley, Ill., is the Region III ESAP award winner.

According to a nomination by the Illinois Beef Association, conservation of the land and efficient utilization of the resources have been a long-time priority at Funk Farms Trust, which is owned by Dan and Kathy Koons. The Funk Farms Trust is one of the oldest farms in Illinois, dating back to 1824. Currently, Funk Farms Trust encompasses 2,175 acres, of which 1,700 acres are used for corn and soybean production.

Funk Farms Trust has worked with many organizations to improve the environmental quality of its operation, including the USDA Natural Resources Conservation Services (NRCS), the McLean County Soil Conservation Service, and the Illinois Department of Natural Resources. Conservation and stewardship measures taken by the farm include establishing 35 miles of waterways and 25 miles of terraces to prevent soil erosion, establishing grass along hedgerows, recycling nutrients back into fields by utilizing a feedlot and handling manure through composting.

Preserving hedgerows and buffer areas throughout the farm is required at Funk Farms Trust. The farm uses hedgerows to help improve air quality by diminishing wind, airborne dust and pollutant distribution. These hedgerows also address water quality issues by filtering and slowing rainfall, allowing runoff to percolate slowly into the soil and water table.

“Funk Farms has always been a shining example of what conservation and stewardship could be and should be on farms and feedlots in the Midwest,”



► Funk Farms Trust, located in Shirley, Ill., is the Region III ESAP award winner.

said Steven Foglesong, owner of Black Gold Ranch and Feedlot, and past NCBA president. “Funk Farms has always been willing to try new technology in their conservation efforts and then share the results with others as is evidenced by the many open houses and field days held there over the years. Dan and Kathy have always been willing to open their doors and be advocates for not only the beef industry, but the rest of agriculture as well.”

Funk Farms Trust is an affiliate member of the American Angus Association.



► Glenowen Farm, owned by the Thomas family of Round Hill, Va., is the Region I ESAP award winner.

### Glenowen Farm

Glenowen Farm, owned by the Thomas family of Round Hill, Va., is the Region I ESAP award winner.

Glenowen Farm sits at the foot of the Blue Ridge Mountains in the northwest corner of Loudoun County, approximately 60 miles from downtown Washington, D.C. The Thomas family has owned Glenowen since 1784, and it has been designated as a Virginia Century Farm. Glenowen Farm comprises approximately 800 acres and produces registered Angus cattle for sale to beef cattle producers and freezer beef for local consumers. The farm also raises all the required crops (corn, barley and orchard grass hay) to feed the cattle and periodically

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## Stewards of the Land CONTINUED FROM PAGE 291

sells excess bushel corn and orchard grass round bales of hay.

The Thomas family has demonstrated an unparalleled commitment to sustainability through implementing a dedicated conservation plan during the past 10 years. The family has accomplished a generational change in ownership and management, renovated the 250-year-old homestead, placed a conservation easement on 400 acres, implemented farm best management practices, installed a new water system to transform the property into compliance with the Chesapeake Bay Act, constructed new electric fences to utilize efficient rotational grazing strategies, constructed cattle handling facilities to improve herd genetics and health, and protected abundant wildlife and habitat on the property.

“The stewardship efforts of the Thomas family are evidenced in all aspects of their operation,” said Leslie Grayson, deputy director of the Virginia Outdoors Foundation. “The permanent protection of the property with an easement is coupled with land management practices and business decisions that assure the land will be in good condition and available for future generations to farm.”

Glenowen Farm is a member of the American Angus Association.



► Slovek Ranch, owned by Bill and Pennie Slovek of Philip, S.D., is the Region VII ESAP award winner.

### Slovek Ranch

Slovek Ranch, owned by Bill and Pennie Slovek of Philip, S.D., is the Region VII ESAP award winner.

Slovek Ranch is a family-operated cow-calf and yearling operation consisting of 13,200 acres of pastureland and 800 acres of hay ground. Since cattle provide the primary income for the ranch, pasture and feed management are imbedded in the Slovek Ranch management practices. One important grazing tactic introduced was incorporating rest for grass growth to

build plant vigor. The Sloveks are very conscious about the number of days a pasture is able to rest. Management-intensive grazing practices have resulted in seasonal rotation of pasture, requiring each pasture to be grazed in a different season each year.

Due to drought and invasion of exotic plant species, some pastureland has been dominated by undesirable plants. By participating with the South Dakota Department of Game, Fish and Parks in the Coordinated Restoration of Native Grasslands project, Slovek Ranch participated in a controlled burn to aid in the promotion of native grasses. Slovek Ranch also participates in the NRCS Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP), and recycles 100% of all farm lubricants. They store all oils, fluids and greases on site then send them to a recycling program. Responsibly managing waste helps protect the quality of groundwater and other natural resources.

“By implementing innovative techniques while practicing sound management decisions, Slovek Ranch has demonstrated intelligent and outstanding environmental stewardship,” said Paul Flynn, in a letter of recommendation from the South Dakota NRCS. “They have been a great example for neighbors and future generations.”

Slovek Ranch is a member of the American Angus Association.

### Sparrowk Livestock

Sparrowk Livestock, owned by Jack and Beverly Sparrowk from Clements, Calif., is the Region VI ESAP award winner.

According to the California Cattlemen’s Association, which nominated Sparrowk Livestock, Jack and Beverly Sparrowk have both taken strong leadership roles in the industry through active participation in local and statewide organizations. Their efforts to forever protect their ranches for the next generation have encouraged others to follow their lead.

The Sparrowks operate their family ranching business on 85,000 acres including U.S. Forest Service permit lands, encompassing four ranches in Northern California and Southern Oregon. The Sparrowks have been instrumental in working with range scientists and other industry professionals to evaluate grazing practices and their effect on natural resources. It was through their efforts and



► Sparrowk Livestock, owned by Jack and Beverly Sparrowk from Clements, Calif., is the Region VI ESAP award winner.

cooperation that a groundbreaking study was completed that demonstrated the benefits of managed grazing in the health of vernal pool wetlands.

In addition, the Sparrowks have devoted much of their own funding and cost-share funds to the environmental improvement of their ranch lands. Miles of Sparrowk ranch stream banks have been restored with thousands of willows and the construction of check dams to improve wetlands, restore wildlife habitat and increase herd carrying capacity.

“The Sparrowk family is so committed to the cause of rangeland conservation that they were instrumental in the establishment of the Oregon Rangeland Trust,” said Billy Gatlin, executive vice president of the California Cattlemen’s Association. “They have stewarded and protected their ranches for many years, and have taken the vital steps to ensure that the succeeding generations will have the natural resources needed to continue the family’s proud tradition of cattle production.”

Sparrowk Livestock is an affiliate member of the American Angus Association and the Sparrowks’ son is a junior member.

A national award winner will be recognized during the 2013 Cattle Industry Annual Convention and NCBA Trade Show that will be Feb. 6-9, 2013, in Tampa, Fla. Dow AgroSciences, the Natural Resources Conservation Service and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service sponsor the award program.



**Editor’s Note:** Compiled from releases provided by the NCBA.