

# TAKE CHARGE

by Ann Gooding

*Performance. Show ring. Tall cattle. Short cattle. Black cattle. White cattle.*

*None of that's going to matter. Not when people quit eating beef. It won't matter what size, what breed, what type your cattle are. Because no one's going to buy them.*

*Now, right now, you as a cattelman can do one of two things. You can ignore all this—then in 15 or 20 years you can scratch your head and wonder what happened. Or you can read on, get mad, realize the need for more research, more promotion. It's a simple choice. You can sit back and chance losing your livelihood or you can take charge.*

The problem facing the cattle industry is pretty obvious. It is so obvious, in fact, that most cattlemen aren't paying much attention. Propaganda against red meat in the diet has been and continues to be aimed at consumers. Advertising extolls the virtues of polyunsaturated fats. Popular magazines predict dire physical consequences from beef consumption. It has become common knowledge among many consumers that beef causes cancer and heart disease.

And where did this idea get started? Your government. Uncle Sam. Through dietary

goals and reports from the surgeon general, your government is warning Americans to cut down on beef consumption, inferring that anyone doing so will automatically reduce their chances of developing heart disease and cancer.

And on what is your government basing its opinion? Much of it is based on nothing more than assumptions drawn from population studies, animal studies, studies involving drugs and uncommon diets.

Unfortunately, these assumptions have been beamed consistently at consumers for so long that not only the average person but also some people in the health business are beginning to take them for gospel, to believe beef consumption is indeed hazardous to health, right up there with smoking cigarettes and swimming in shark-infested waters.

It doesn't take a genius to figure out what that attitude, if it is allowed to continue, could do to the nation's diet and health—not to mention its impact on the beef cattle industry and its future.

And although the problem may be obvious, it is anything but simple. It would take volumes to completely cover the sub-

ject. There are, however, some facts that don't get much attention, that get buried under the propaganda. And they need some airing.

## **Cholesterol**

Cholesterol. The word strikes terror in the hearts of the American public, just as the anti-meat movement intends, because on this is based all of the movement's assumptions. The movement would have us believe that cholesterol is a chemically toxic substance hazardous to health. In truth, it exists naturally in the human body. It is essential to life. It maintains the structure of the cell membranes, contributes to the formation of certain sex hormones and vitamin D.

Proponents of the anti-beef crusade, after inferring that cholesterol is akin to poison, would then have everyone believing beef is simply dripping with the stuff and that other meats (if one must eat meat at all) should be substituted if one expects to live past the next meal. Facts just don't bear that out. A 3-oz. serving of beef accounts for 77 mg. of cholesterol, while a similar serving of chicken (half white, half dark meat) has 73 mg., turkey 75. Shrimp (again 3 oz.) has

128 mg., and herring and mackerel account for 82 and 86 respectively. Lobster contains 85.

Then, according to the anti-beefers, saturated fats rank right up there with cholesterol and in turn these fats have been successfully associated with beef. Actually, beef contains both saturated and unsaturated fats in nearly a one to one ratio which, according to many nutritionists, is desirable.

### Heart Disease

Having planted seeds of suspicion, first that cholesterol and saturated fats are poison and second that beef is loaded with them, the anti-meat movement goes in for the kill—all with the government's blessing. Perhaps the movement's most widely spread and successful propaganda, that which frightens consumers half to death, names red meat the No. 1 culprit in heart disease.

The propaganda assumes that cholesterol and saturated fat intake is related to cholesterol levels in the body—and that's the big question. Anti-meat people imply that, by merely eating foods containing cholesterol, a person's level of serum (blood) cholesterol will rise. Even though the anti-meat movement chooses to ignore them, study upon study questions this connection.

For example, in an experiment at Texas A&M, professors followed four separate diets: (1) Red meat and no visible eggs, (2) red meat and three visible eggs [a large egg contains 252 mg. cholesterol], (3) poultry and fish and no visible eggs, (4) poultry and fish and three visible eggs. As a group, there was no significant build-up of cholesterol resulting from any of the diets. In fact, most of the participants recorded a

slightly lower serum cholesterol content when on the red meat diets than when eating fish and poultry.

After assuming a connection between dietary cholesterol and serum cholesterol, the anti-beefers then suggest that elevated cholesterol causes heart disease. Once again, proof does not exist.

For one thing, studies have shown that only 30-40% of the people experiencing heart disease have elevated serum cholesterol (the same percentage as the

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general population). So if elevated cholesterol is the cause of heart disease, how are the other 60-70% of those stricken (but who do not show elevated cholesterol) explained?

Other studies pose similar questions. Why, for example, do men living in different areas but having the same serum cholesterol levels experience different rates of heart disease? This has happened and no one has the answer. But the government seems to be ignoring the conflict.

### Cancer

Moving right along, the anti-meat gang then supports yet another in the series of unsubstantiated theories—that as dietary intake of animal fat increases, there is a corresponding increase in cancers, specifically breast and colon. Once again, studies question this theory's validity.

For example, people in the Netherlands and Finland have been found to consume 100 gm. of animal fat per day. In the Netherlands that accounts for 65% of the total fat intake and in Finland 88%. But the Netherlands has twice the incidence of breast and colon cancer as Finland.

And in another study, higher economic classes in Cali, Columbia, have four times greater incidence of colon cancer than the lower classes even though the higher classes consume less animal fat than do the lower.

Once again, it doesn't take a genius to question the theory although, unfortunately, our government subscribes to it wholeheartedly.

The so-called rising incidence of heart disease and cancer, often used as a scare tactic in the crusade against meats, deserves some scrutiny itself. A decrease in deaths from infections and from malnutrition must be taken into consideration as must an increase in life expectancy (which amounts to 20 years since the turn of the century). Then one must realize that cancer and heart disease are degenerative by nature, that the probability they will strike increases with age. So is the problem disease? Or the inevitability of death? Actually, deaths from cardiovascular disease and cancer (except lung) have decreased on an age-adjusted basis during the last 30 years—coinciding, by the way, with an increase in per capita beef consumption.

### Polyunsaturates

Now here's the clincher. The government loves them as do the others involved in the anti-meat movement. But beware—polyunsaturates may prove hazardous to your health.

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Anti-meat propaganda supported by the U.S. government has successfully associated beef and other red meats with heart disease and cancer even though 25 years of study have not substantiated the connection. Unfortunately, the idea leads people to believe that a change in diet will insure good health, when in fact a change in diet may only serve to rob them of valuable nutrients.

Although beef had been under fire before, the 1977 dietary goals set forth by Sen. McGovern's select subcommittee elevated the red meat question to a position of political importance, focusing it in the national spotlight. Those first goals, making blanket dietary recommendations for the entire U.S. population and based on some very questionable evidence, were promoted for their alleged ability to prevent diseases. And they came out point-blank against red meat.

Even though no proof connecting beef consumption and ill health has surfaced, the government has hammered away, justifying its stand by claiming that, although dietary changes may not solve health problems and prevent diseases, they won't hurt anything either. But that point is highly debatable simply because beef is a complete balanced protein food containing many necessary vitamins and minerals.

For example, of 20 amino acids composing human protein, eight are essential and must be supplied by diet. Animal

proteins contain all eight in a nice tidy package. Plant foods can supply them only if eaten in special combinations, all at the same time, something that requires sophisticated nutritional knowledge.

And iron is recognized as the most commonly deficient nutrient in the U.S. diet. Even the most dyed-in-the-wool anti-meat activists can't argue that red meat is one of the best sources of iron available for use in the body. The iron in red meat is not only four to five times better absorbed by the body than is iron from plant foods, but it also aids absorption of other dietary iron. (By the way, the iron in enriched breads and cereals can be chalked up as virtually useless except as an effective sales device, because that type of iron is essentially insoluble, therefore unavailable to the human system.)

Dietary goal proponents in recommending reduced meat consumption and increased cereal grains are courting another deficiency—zinc. Not only does meat provide a significant portion of dietary zinc, but cereal grains increase an acid that binds zinc, reducing its availability to the body.

Then there are the B vitamins. Meat is loaded with them.

Because meat supplies so many nutrients in such a handy package, the list could go on and on. Why the government and anti-meat activists want to eliminate such a valuable food defies reason.

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In a study of people who survived heart attacks, those allowed to eat anything they wanted had a significantly higher survival rate than those put on a polyunsaturated fat diet.

Another study indicated that cancer patients seemed to lose natural defenses against the disease when placed on diets high in polyunsaturates.

Polyunsaturates—the darlings through all this dietary drama, suggested by the government as animal fat replacements—could be dangerous. And those condemning animal fats and praising polyunsaturates may have jumped the gun, an unforgivable thing for those in the self-assumed role of determining a nation's diet.

Polyunsaturates are characterized by chemically altered bonds called trans-fatty acids; evidence exists that these trans-fatty acids affect the functions of cell membranes, apparently allowing cancer-causing agents to more easily permeate cell walls. The alarming thing here is that persons following current government dietary recommendations, substituting vegetable fats for animal fats, may actually be subjecting themselves to a high dose of a cancer-related agent.

Funny thing, not many popular magazines talk about trans-fatty acids. No vegetable oil ads mention them. Government dietary recommendations ignore them. But they do exist and consumers should be aware of them. And the polyunsaturates, like all the rest of the diet-health controversy, demand more study.

## One Final Question

This all leads to one question. Why? Why all the scare tactics? The propaganda?

No one knows for sure. But with so much at stake, it is unfortunate that no clear-cut conclusions have been reached in the dietary debate. And it's sad that so much effort is being expended to connect cancer and heart disease with diet and red meats, while perhaps real causes are going undetected.

Some scientists feel it may become more difficult to get government funding for research unless they support the popular diet-health theory. And money to research polyunsaturates is hard to come by from a government supposedly concerned with a nation's health.

Is the government really interested in national health? Or is it duping the American public? At the public's expense. And the cattlemen's. Remember, this is the same government that brought you the swine flu vaccine and subsequent chaos a few years back.


The evidence is not all in, but even now, with available facts, those condemning beef are pushing their credibility a bit far.

But are we stopping them? Heavens no! We're sitting secure in our own little worlds, happy to have a decent calf crop every year, delighted to get 90¢ for our calves, ecstatic over a purple rosette, pleased with a 3.8 ADG.

Too many are taking too little action to protect their industry. And all the while, the government and others are bombarding the public with half-truths, conjectures, inconclusive and incomplete evidence and, in some cases, just plain lies. And people are beginning to believe that beef will kill them or, at the very least, will hasten them to their demise.

Perhaps it is time to take action, to settle the diet controversy once and for all. Perhaps it is time we in the beef industry joined forces, collected money for research, for promotion. Perhaps it's time we justified our existence, preferably before the government puts an end to it.

There is coming up shortly a national referendum, a voluntary self-help program designed by cattlemen, for cattlemen, to raise money for research, for promotion. It's called the Beef referendum.

Perhaps it's time we voted for it. 

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