

LEAD IN

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"What is that child eating?" a four-year-old asked her mother about another child eating a hotdog.

"It's a dead pig," her mother answered.

"I know it's a dead pig," the child responded, "but what's that wrapped around it?" This girl, daughter of a midwest vegetarian who is also a strong advocate of eliminating animal agriculture, had never even seen a hotdog bun.

This quote was the kicker in a recent *Time* magazine health and fitness article titled "Vegetarians Hit the Fern Bars". "For those who want to pass the vegetarian gospel on to the next generation, the key seems to be a firm stand and an early start," the *Time* article concluded.

It also pointed out that there are some 8 million vegetarians in this country, and their numbers are on the rise. What's more, they and many of their doctors are on a campaign to eliminate fat in the diet-everyone's diet. In this context, they look upon red meat as the most obvious, sinister source of dietary fat.

"A well-planned vegetarian diet can be perfectly healthful. In fact, it may be more in line with the recommended U.S. guidelines for reducing sodium, saturated fat, and cholesterol and increasing dietary fiber and starch," a nutritionist from the New England Medical Center in Boston is quoted in the *Time* story.

Those of us who feel so smug these days about the beef business had better take a closer look at reality. Profitable prices and slightly improved demand are little more than a fragile bubble at this stage in our cattle cycle. The fact is that we in the beef business are in a very precarious position. We have been given a reprieve, but we have a long fight on our hands if we are to free ourselves from the restraints and the labels that many people would place upon us, our business, and our product.

Our foes are the vegetarians, the animal rights people, the misguided physicians and nutritionists—and not the least, those cattle producers who do not favor the beef referendum.

Not often in our lifetime do we have the opportunity to really make a difference in the way things are or the way that they can be. But we in the beef business have this opportunity on May 10. That day we will determine whether or not the beef checkoff, and the information and advertising programs it supports, will become a permanent support in our business.

The fact is that the beef industry cannot afford a defeat of the checkoff proposal. As individuals or even as local or state groups, we cannot match, let alone defeat, the forces who, with religious zeal, would put an end to meat eating and meat production.

By the same token splintered groups cannot effectively fight the misinformation, the vindictiveness, and the outright untruthfulness that has been partially successful in labeling beef as an unhealthy food that saps ones stamina and clogs ones heart and arteries.

We have a fight on our hands. The enemy is well-known and well-armed and has every intention of putting us out of the cattle business. The next shot we must fire in this battle for our livelihood and our way of life should be on May 10. That's when we can march *en masse* to our county extension office with everyone in our family and all our friends and neighbors who are eligible to vote, and help insure that the Beef Checkoff program is continued.

