

Changing with the Times

In the past, cattle producers' concerns likely centered around which bull should be put with their first-calf heifers and who should grease the windmills.

Needless to say, things have changed.

Today's cattle producer is challenged by issues such as beef safety and animal rights which threaten their very existence. Fortunately for cattle producers, however, there is the American National CattleWomen.

The American National CattleWomen (ANCW) organization plays an integral role in today's beef industry and has for more than 50 years. ANCW's roots trace to the lean years of the Depression, when cattlemen banded together on local and state levels to support a sagging livestock industry. This led to an alliance known as the CowBelles, formed in 1952. The name was changed to American National CattleWomen in 1986 to reflect the organization's national scope.

ANCW's fundamental belief is that the beef industry is of basic importance to world existence. With that in mind, its only membership requirement is the desire to promote beef and the beef industry. Today, more than 10,000 volunteer members and 39 state organizations make up ANCW.

As ANCW enters a new decade, it, like the beef industry it supports, realizes that it cannot rely wholly on a successful track record to stay ahead in a dynamic marketplace. Changing consumer demands and preferences require changes in beef industry strategies. Therefore, ANCW is re-evaluating its position within the industry to help meet the challenges of the consumer.

"ANCW, as an organization, is now at a crossroads in terms of its purpose and function," says ANCW president Jane Lindgren, Joliet, Mont. "Our beef cattle industry is changing rapidly. Last year when the National Cattlemen's Association released its Concentration/Integration Task Force report, it indicated that we will see increasing integration, especially between packers and feeders, and between feeders and growers.

"Implications for the structure of the cattle industry are staggering. There are new parameters involved in determining

which organizations will fulfill which functions to effectively advance the U.S. beef cattle industry. Every organization in the beef cattle industry must go through a re-evaluation process, looking at its mission, goals and objectives."

Passage of the beef referendum is a symbol of change. Lindgren says. Funding for various industry activities is now different in some respects. The Beef Board Operating Committee has urged further refinement to a process designed to better coordinate programs developed using the dollar checkoff. How the industry responds, and how ANCW responds, are important for effective resolution of conflicts in this changing beef cattle industry.

As ambassadors of the beef cattle industry, ANCW members continually work toward keeping consumers informed about the nutritional benefits of beef and its adaptability as a food source.

A perfect means to accomplish these goals is the National Beef Cook-Off, which ANCW has sponsored for the past 16 years.

It hasn't taken long for the National Beef Cook-Off to grow from a small, seven-state contest at a Denver, Colo. high school, to a major event on the food contest circuit.

For consumers, the Beef Cook-Off is a chance to share in more than \$35,500 in cash prizes, as well as win national acclaim as the nation's No. 1 amateur chef. For the beef industry, the National Beef Cook-Off is the year's largest publicity-generating activity. For sponsors and contributors, the event is an opportunity to associate with a national food event that celebrates beef.

The CattleWomen are responsible for all phases of the Beef Cook-Off— from planning and fund-raising to the actual implementation. Years of preparation are needed to stage the Beef Cook-Off, beginning with site selection and the appointment of a chairman.

States wishing to host the event must submit a proposal three years in advance of the Beef Cook-Off which includes the event's specifics — where it will take place, how it will be funded — and the recommendation and resume of a pro-

posed Beef Cook-Off chair. Under ANCW's structure and recent revisions, the National Beef Cook-Off chairman goes on to serve in an advisory capacity. She reviews proposals for upcoming Beef Cook-Offs, advises the new chairman and works with individual state cook-offs.

Because the National Beef Cook-Off is such a tremendous beef industry public relations event, principle financial support comes from checkoff dollars through the Cattlemen's Beef Promotion and Research Board. Additional funding is obtained by state CattleWomen, from state beef councils, and from both consumer and beef industry product manufacturers. Part of this funding is used for promotions and national publicity, which ANCW coordinates with the Beef Industry Council.

Finally, the CattleWomen are responsible for the actual staging of the event and the numerous duties — from grocery shopping for the contestants to entertainment and tours — which are required to ensure that all 64 contestants have the time and space needed for preparing their recipes. No detail is left unattended. It has been estimated that 14,000 hours alone went into the preparation of last year's National Beef Cook-Off in Portland, Ore.

All of the work the CattleWomen do is on a volunteer basis. Without a doubt, one of their most important contributions to the beef industry is their personal involvement with the Beef Cook-Off.

ANCW also works closely with the NCA on issues such as animal welfare, beef safety and the environment, which are changing the very face of the beef industry. Through a combined effort among ANCW and the beef industry, legislation and changes, which are necessary to assist the beef industry in these rather turbulent times, will result.

"With change comes challenge, with challenge comes opportunity, and with opportunity comes success," says Lindgren. "ANCW has accepted the challenge to change in order to find the opportunities for success in the 1990s."

