

LEAD IN

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Bob Snyder, who so influenced the American Angus Association's public relations program for so many years, loved to tell his "dog food" story to illustrate a fundamental point about business.

Briefly, it went like this. A major company, before introducing a new dog food, spent millions of dollars on research to ensure the new product had complete nutrition, that the package appealed to the pet food buyers, and that the advertising would attract buyers and make them want to try the new product. The new dog food was introduced with great fanfare and sales hit record heights. But within a month the market dropped to almost nothing. At a quickly called emergency meeting, the executives discussed what could possibly be wrong. They hadn't a clue. Finally, a meek little junior executive put his hand up and was grudgingly acknowledged by the chairman of the board.

"Mr. Chairman," the man said in a low voice, "I think I know what the problem is—dogs don't like the damn stuff."

I am convinced that the same problem exists today in the beef industry. One good example is the "lite" or "lean" beef markets. A lot of cattle producers and others, including re-

spected universities, are putting most of their eggs in the lean beef basket. Why not? Consumers day after day say that lean is keen and fat is bad.

But the problem, of course, is that when many of these consumers get that "lite beef" home, they, like the dogs in the story, "don't like the damn stuff." You may have read the article on page 108 of the May 19 edition of *TIME* magazine, that reviewed some of what they termed the "new beefs." The writer went beyond propaganda and actually cooked various kinds of low fat beef. Here is what the *TIME* writer had to say:

Beefalo—"Stews were barely acceptable. Roasts, however, were much too dry because the meat lacked the fat to keep them supple."

Chianina from Texas Tech University in Lubbock—"Cooked as directed, the rather pale meat with slightly yellowish fat was virtually tasteless except for slight acidic overtones. . . . What little fat there was in Chianina cuts had an unpleasant waxy aftertaste that marred roasts and stews. The braised cuts were extremely dense when cooked because they were too lean."

Zebu, tested for fat and calorie count at Texas A&M University—" . . . was the least acceptable of the beefs tested. Both the meat and fat had an even sharper acidic flavor and aftertaste than the Chianina."

The bright spot in this article for Angus breeders was that the writer liked an Angus product raised and marketed by Fred Grant at Stamford, Ct. The journalist called it " . . . by far the best of the four varieties. The various bright ruby red cuts were extraordinarily juicy and flavorful. That juiciness was unique among the low-fat beefs . . ."

The point of this article is not to be

critical of other breeds nor to knock anyone who attempts to produce and market a low-fat product. Rather it's to emphasize how essential it is to know our market—to know what the immediate consumer of our product really wants, needs, and likes, and then proceed to target our production and marketing to fill the demand.

I get a bit perturbed from time to time with people who knock breeders of performance cattle, or show cattle, or big cattle, or little cattle. First of all, I don't think that the cattle business, even the Angus business, is conveniently divided up into two, three, or four neat compartments. I know people who combine show and performance into a very successful and profitable breeding and merchandising program. I know people who breed and emphasize performance cattle to fill an important profit-making market segment. I know people who have been highly successful at ignoring performance altogether while they concentrate upon structure and show ring appeal.

None of these people are wrong. Why? Because they do what they know and like best, and more important, because they have a clear vision of their market and a thorough understanding of what their customers like, want, and need.

There is room for a wide diversity of breeds, products, and individual breeders with different, even radical, philosophies in the beef cattle business. The only criteria we should use to determine if they are wrong or right is whether they serve a defined market by producing what is wanted, liked, and needed by their customers. Conversely, all our ideas and our well-laid production plans are for naught if our customers react like the canines in Bob Snyder's story. **AJ**