

# The Dream of a Better Tomorrow

by Daniel Foster

*During a business trip, R. J. Wrigley was seated next to a fellow traveler who questioned his business strategies. The man asked Wrigley why he continued to advertise so widely when his company was already the most successful chewing gum manufacturer and distributor in the world. Mr. Wrigley replied, "For the same reason that the pilot of this airplane keeps the engines running after we are already in the air!"*



Daniel Foster, Tucson, Ariz.

In order for the beef industry to continue to enjoy success like it has for the past century, it must confront an increasing problem of agricultural illiteracy. With less than 2 percent of our nation's population working in production agriculture, most American consumers simply do not know where their food comes from. If a majority of the consumers' only interaction with the agriculture industry is buying blue jeans at the mall, or

a steak at the grocery store, then the door of misunderstanding is left wide open. They do not personally know the rancher who awakens before the dawn to check his heifers in the freezing cold or who stays up until the late of night to help a cow deliver a calf. Most consumers are out of touch and base their opinions and purchasing habits on popular media channels.

As members of the cattle industry, we can do three things to battle this problem. First, we must be open with the public and be true to the purpose of our industry. Next, we must support youth groups and educate future generations of Americans to the importance of beef production on their daily lives. Finally, we must have the courage to pursue our dream of an educated consumer. If we can accomplish these things, then we will fly higher than ever before.

We must be open with the public and true to our purpose. When approached and asked why we are branding a steer, a simple statement regarding the need for accurate identification is appropriate. "Because I want to," or "because I always have," are statements that plant the seeds of antagonism. When practical, making our operations open to the public through school or community tours, gives insight into the how and why of the cattle industry.

Many say that the average citizen would not understand what is going on; this is the very reason why we need to invite them to come and learn. Pro-active involvement offsets erroneous information purporting animal cruelty and encourages education through experience.

The great Will Rogers once said, "You need to live so that you can sell the family parrot to the town gossip." As an industry we need to be open about our practices and motivate citizens to seek the truth instead of surrendering to false propaganda.

Next, we must educate future generations of Americans to combat the false propaganda to which they are subjected. The youth of today are the voters and legislators of tomorrow who will be developing the agricultural policy of the future. We must tell them our story because if we don't, no one will. Activist groups provide impressionable children with false information.

For example, People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals (PETA) uses its mascot, Chris P. Carrot, to advocate the vegetarian lifestyle and to publish material portraying the rancher as killing his four-legged friends. Bumper stickers proclaiming "Meat is Murder" are readily available.

One way to tell the beef side of the story is to support youth

groups like 4-H and FFA which have programs like "Food for America." Through this program, FFA members present to elementary students the importance of agriculture by educating them about where their food comes from. The opportunity is available to begin solving the problems of the future today by educating the voters of tomorrow.

Finally, we must have the courage to follow our dreams. Is it idealistic to think that through education our problems will disappear? This is believed to be only a dream, yet dreams are the seedlings of all realities. Likewise, knowledge is power — the power to make wise and logical decisions regarding the future of agricultural industries. If our citizens have the knowledge/power to make such logical decisions, then they will always seek the truth and move to correct agricultural illiteracy in America.

As Walt Disney once said, "If you can dream it, you can do it." The cattle industry can and will do whatever it takes to soar to new plateaus of success.

*Editor's note: National Junior Angus Association member Daniel Foster, Tucson, Ariz., was recognized at the 1997 National Cattlemen's Beef Association's inspiration breakfast as recipient of the Chicago Mercantile Exchange (CME) and the National Cattlemen's Foundation's beef industry scholarship. Printed here is Foster's essay*

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