

# PROMOTING BEEF in the New Millennium

The speeches won the 2000 NAs public speaking contest



## JUNIOR DIVISION

### Keep Farms Off the Endangered Species List

by John Pfeiffer, Mulhall, Okla.

Endangered species — any species threatened by extinction. Is the family farm an endangered species? Only 2% of the population is employed in production agriculture. That is endangered!

It is easy to say that never before has the family farm faced so many obstacles and challenges. It is true that although other segments of our economy are amassing great wealth, agricultural producers are in financial crisis. We are paying year 2000 prices for our inputs and receiving 1950 prices for our commodities.

TV stars and bored socialites know how to care for our land better than we do. The discovery of a red snail darter can force us to idle our land to conserve habitat. Multibillion-dollar corporations want to control our food supply from the seed grain to the loaf of bread. New technologies can pinpoint how much fertilizer each foot of our field needs, but we are still trying to pay for the 24-foot (ft.) field cultivator.

We are challenged, yes, but so was the 1930s dirt farmer who watched his crops die and literally blow away before his eyes. In 1936 my great-grandfather slaughtered his cow herd for a government payment of \$10 a head. The drought meant no one had money to buy beef anyway. He gave the slaughtered cows to neighbors or to anyone who could dress them out. Those were tough times.

Obstacles and challenges are all family farmers have ever known. For decades American farmers have tilled their soil in the belief that the world has to have food. ... Next year's crop will be better. ... It will rain again. Our hardheaded resolve is not enough, though, to keep our farms off the endangered list.

The Dust Bowl of the 1930s gave rise to the Soil Conservation Service and tillage methods that prevented a new Dust Bowl in the drought years of the 1990s. We must meet our current agricultural crisis with a defined national policy that sustains the family farm.

Currently, 90% of our farms are in the "small" category — with less than \$250,000 in sales yearly — and produce 40% of crops and livestock. The other 10% produce the remaining 60% of food and fiber.

Right now many of the small farms are sustained by off-farm income. The family farm that is too small to support the family and too large to free the farmer to work full-time off the farm is an endangered species.

Three decades ago our domestic energy polices decided it was cheaper to import our oil and fuel needs than to encourage domestic production. Today our fuel costs depend on how much oil OPEC (Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries) decides to



Junior-division winners are (from left) **John Pfeiffer**, Mulhall, Okla., first; **Peter Scharpe**, Arlington, Minn., second; and **Kindra Wood**, Holly Pond, Ala., third.



Intermediate-division winners are (from left) **Adam Jones**, Saint Francis, Kan., first; and **Kelli Armbruster**, Burlington, Okla., third.



Senior-division winners are (from left) **Jessica Sawyer**, Bassett, Neb., first; **Jennifer Scharpe**, Arlington, Minn., second; and **Cindy Rezac**, Saint Marys, Kan., third.

send. So far they haven't been very concerned about our complaints of rising fuel costs. Do we want our domestic food supply to reach the same constraints? Will it really be cheaper to import our food in the long run?

I believe in the free-enterprise system, but there are several policies that level the playing field for the family farm. First — new government regulations on environment and land-use issues need

to be based on sound science. Farmers should not be forced to higher standards than their city cousins. Cost sharing of conservation plans should be implemented.

Next — agricultural interests should be protected when talks resume with the World Trade Organization (WTO). European countries unfairly reject our products due to genetically altered seed and hormone-fed beef even though these two practices have no scientifically found side effects. Last year 54% of the soybeans grown in the United States were from biotech varieties. This year that percent is projected to be down due to irrational complaints from foreign markets protecting their own subsidized crops.

Whatever form the Freedom to Farm Act evolves into will require considerable thought and vision to keep our family farms off the endangered list. American agriculture has provided the safest and most reliable food supply in the world. We have pulled ourselves out of a hole before, and I am confident that our hard work today will ensure that my grandchildren don't slaughter their cows for \$10 a head.

## INTERMEDIATE DIVISION

### Overcoming Obstacles to Increased Beef Demand

by Adam Jones, Saint Francis, Kan.

*Well, we got trouble right here in the beef industry.  
And that's trouble, oh yes,  
We got lots and lots 'a trouble.  
Trouble, with a capital "T,"  
And that rhymes with "B."  
And that stands for beef!  
Yes, sir,  
We got trouble with beef demand.*

The United States beef industry employs more than a million people and produces nearly 25% of the world's beef supply. Cattle production, the largest segment of the agricultural economy, contributes \$153 billion to the nation's economy. Almost half (45%) of U.S. cattle businesses have been in the same family for 50 years.

There is nothing wrong with U.S. beef production, but beef consumption is a different story. Consumption of red meat has decreased 15 pounds (lb.) per person in the last 20 years, although this year we have seen a small turnaround in consumer demand. What can we do to keep this trend heading in a favorable direction?

To market any product, consumers need to have faith that the product they are eating is safe, affordable and healthy. The cattle industry has worked hard to ensure that our product meets all three of these. Still, it's difficult to change people's preconceived ideas, so how can we overcome these obstacles to increased beef demand?

The obvious answers are public education, convenience and "branded beef." The industry is working on these ideas.

Value-added foods help the consumer prepare healthy, tasty meals in minutes. Branded beef is now a reality, helping to ensure consistency of quality. [Brands by the] Certified Angus Beef LLC, U.S. Premium Beef and other similar programs are starting to become recognizable to the American consumer as products of superior quality.

Meat cookery education is being addressed right at the meat counter with the meatcase simplification concept. Stickers are put on the packages of meat with cooking instructions.

These solutions to increasing beef demand are in effect, and the industry is using them to help solve the problem. Nevertheless,

rather than look to past solutions, maybe we should look to the future — children!

According to information supplied to the Youth Strategic Planning Task Force by the Geppetto Group from New York, "the generation of kids now 5 to 18, the sons and daughters of the baby boomers, rivals the boomers' size and buying clout." A survey conducted by Nickelodeon indicated that 88% of children prepare their own breakfast. This same survey also stated that one-third of kids make family dinners. Children 3-4 years of age recognize brand names; between 5-7 [years of age], they are going to supermarkets and purchasing items by themselves.

Children are unique customers:

- **They are purchasers.** By the end of this year, kids will spend \$300 billion.

- **They are influencers.** In the food category alone, kids influence the spending of \$88 billion. (Ever gone grocery shopping with a child?)

- **They are the future.** James McNeal, professor of marketing at Texas A&M University, says: "As a future market, kids have the most market potential, for they will eventually buy all goods and services. If a business nurtures kids as future customers, they are more apt to like that company and prefer its product and services once they get old enough to buy them on their own."

The marketing motto for the next decade will be, "If you don't have a kids' product, get one!" Maybe it's time the beef industry got one!

Kids are very brand-oriented when purchasing goods. We see evidence of this by what kids buy. Nike® tennis shoes. (Are they really better than those Payless specials?) Gap jeans. (Honestly, they don't fit any better, they just have a classy label.)

Beef is not a "brand" to kids. We are aware of the marketing benefits of branded beef, but we are not thinking about kids while developing a beef brand. Kids want to know that a product is made for them, something that they can connect to. Something they can identify.

We know that branded beef is a slow and expensive process. But maybe we could create a personality or character that signifies "kid approved" products. (Look what Tony the Tiger did for boring old Corn Flakes.) This beef character would be wherever beef products are kid-appropriate, whether it is the meatcase, ready-to-serve or frozen food items.

When we develop new ads, we need to make them "kid-fun." Our access to reaching children is quite vast; cable television, magazines and radio rank high on influencing teens' marketing decisions. Teens are sophisticated consumers; they want products of superior quality. Nonetheless, their overriding motivation is to buy fun products. We need to convey the message in our ads that the reason they are having fun is because they are eating beef. A hamburger picnic at the lake with all your friends. A party at your house where everyone is making and eating beef tacos.

Youth are surprisingly health-conscious. From 1998 to 1999, 10% more young men said, "the protein found in red meat is important to building a healthy body." Children have a perception that they shouldn't be health-conscious, but that nutrition is boring. To help them see that beef is good for them they need to see their heroes eating beef. Preferably heroes that are their age or a little older, like teenagers. Maybe even the local high-school track star rather than the national basketball player. Someone they really could be like if they would just eat nutritious, delicious beef!

The cattle industry has some troublesome obstacles to overcome to increase beef demand. There are many ideas in the works,



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including branded beef, scientific studies and education about the healthy attributes of beef. One of the ways I see to lessening these troublesome obstacles to increased beef demand is to extensively market to children. Develop a branded beef that appeals to kids; use advertising to show people of their own age reaping the benefits of eating beef. And, remember, kids just want to have fun. Why not have fun preparing and eating beef?

*Well, we've got a future.  
A future like this industry never had.  
We've got influencin', consumin' youth,  
And that starts with a capital "Y."  
And that rhymes with "buy,"  
And that means beef.  
Buy beef.  
Yes, sir.*



## SENIOR DIVISION Entering the New Millennium — Join the Mule Team

by Jessica Sawyer, Bassett, Neb.

An old farmer had been plowing with an ox and a mule teamed together. One day the ox said to the mule, "Let's play sick today and take it easy."

But the mule said, "No, we need to get our work done."

The ox played sick anyway, and the farmer brought it fresh hay and corn and tried to make it comfortable.

When the mule came in from plowing that day, the ox asked how it went. "We didn't get quite as much done, but we did a fair stretch."

Then the ox asked, "What did the farmer say about me?"

"Nothing," the mule replied.

Thinking he had a good thing going, the ox decided to play sick again the next day. When the mule returned from the field, the ox asked, "How did it go today?"

"Alright," the mule said, "but we didn't get much done."

"Well," the ox continued, "what did the farmer say about me?"

"Nothing to me," the mule answered, "but he did stop to have a long talk with the butcher."

Angus breeders have been the mules of the beef industry. Their diligent efforts to improve beef products and to develop innovative programs have helped stabilize the demand for beef in this country.

When I was younger in Rock County, Neb., Hereford cattle made up about 75% of the cattle population, with many staunch Sandhill ranchers not wanting to give up the red-and-white cattle. Now I am proud to say that 75% of the cattle raised in the county are not only black, but Angus-based.

Why such a turnaround in the last decade? Angus breeders have taken lessons of the past and the technology of the future to develop breeding programs to raise cattle suitable not only for commercial cattle producers but the ultimate consumer as well.

The reason why our nation's herds are turning black is because of forward-thinking Angus breeders who led to the development of Angus Herd Improvement Records (AHIR), the Certified Angus Beef (CAB) Program\* and the National Junior Angus Association (NJAA).

One of the most important changes in our breed has been the advancement of AHIR. In 1958 the American Angus Association adopted the AHIR program to process weights submitted by Angus breeders for in-herd performance comparisons. Today, the computerized data-processing center provides genetic values that help breeders make comparisons of Angus cattle nationwide. The American Angus Association has the largest beef cattle database in the world with more than 3 million performance records, making its expected progeny differences (EPDs) the most accurate genetic values among cattle breeds. Tom Field, keynote speaker at the 1999 National Angus Conference in Amarillo, Texas, stated, "The AHIR database is the single most valuable strategic resource at the Angus producers' disposal."

While Angus producers had the foresight to build a large and accurate database for their performance records, they were also aware of the importance of creating demand for Angus beef. After the USDA lowered the standards for Choice beef in 1976, the American Angus Association established the CAB Program. The mission of this program was two-fold: promote Angus influence among commercial seedstock producers and ensure a high-quality meat product for consumers. Today, *Certified Angus Beef*™ products are sold to nearly 35,000 restaurants and nearly [3,200] retail stores around the world. With 14 years of increased sales of *Certified Angus Beef* products, the demand for Angus bulls has led all breeds for the past four out of five years.

While Angus producers before us were certainly crafty when developing a huge database and increased demand for the Angus product, they were also aware of the fact that these assets would be useless without the advancement of their greatest and most abundant resource — youth.

In 1956 the Junior Activities Department of the American Angus Association was formed to encourage young people to get involved with Angus steer and heifer projects; however, the program has grown to include character-building activities. Now the largest junior beef breed organization in the world with more than 10,000 members, this program has worked to enhance the communication and leadership skills of its members, as well as giving them the opportunity to network with fellow Angus peers across the country.

Through the junior Angus programs, youth are being taught the value of quality beef products. With this knowledge and understanding, they are the beef industry's greatest promoters.

In conclusion, the mule worked diligently for his owner, while the ox became comfortable and complacent. The foundation for the future of the beef industry has been set by Angus breeders who created the Angus Herd Improvement Records, the Certified Angus Beef Program and the National Junior Angus Association. The greatest challenge for Angus breeders is to remain as diligent as the mule, building on programs already established and welcoming new ideas from our youth to propel us successfully into the new millennium.

The story about the mule and the ox and the contributions of Angus breeders in the beef industry have taught us that, if you really want to get a job done, bring in the mule team.



\*The Certified Angus Beef (CAB) Program is owned and administered by Certified Angus Beef LLC, a wholly owned subsidiary of the American Angus Association.