

NJAA Speech Winners Speak Up for Industry

Beef The Right Choice

by Cindy Hooper, Bliss, Idaho, senior division

Is anyone ready for a steak barbecue? How about a prime rib dinner?

There is GOOD NEWS about beef.

Through the combined efforts of ranchers and farmers, packers and retailers, leaner cattle are being brought to market and more closely trimmed beef cuts are sold at the retail counter.

The beef industry is also helping shoppers select and cook leaner beef cuts. They are providing more nutritional information and promoting quick streamlined cooking methods.

American cattle producers are committed to producing and maintaining only the highest quality product, according to the Texas Beef Industry Council and the National Cattlemen's Association (NCA).

Cattlemen are the first link in a chain of people and organizations providing Americans with wholesome beef. They work directly with veterinarians, feed manufacturers and feedlot managers to ensure their cattle are healthy and well kept. Cattlemen have a natural regard and respect for their livestock.

Cattlemen also work with the government at a variety of levels, including at the farm or ranch, feedlots, packing plants and processing facilities so that they are able to meet and exceed government standards for quality.

Our federal government inspectors represent a third party inspection system which is mandatory and rigid. Beef is inspected daily and every individual carcass is examined.

A safe wholesome product is everyone's goal.

No wonder experts often describe the American food supply as "the safest in the world."

Yes, beef is the right choice for your dining pleasure.

Oh, are you a health conscious person? Well, look right this way! Lean beef is regarded by health organizations as a valuable part of American diets. The American Dietetic Association, American Heart Association, and others generally recommend 5 to 7 ounces of lean, trimmed meat daily.

Beef provides an excellent source of essential nutrients like iron, zinc, vitamin B-12 and protein.

The amounts of fat, saturated fat and cholesterol in trimmed beef are low enough that beef is included in low-fat diets. The American Heart Association recommends limiting daily fat intake to 67 grams. The average 3-ounce Choice beef contains 7.9 grams. To visualize a 3-ounce serving of cooked beef, think of the size and thickness of a deck of playing cards.

It is important to know that three main quality grades of



beef are available to the consumer. They are Prime, Choice and Select. Of these three grades, Select has the least amount of fat marbling. It provides fewer calories than Prime or Choice grades, but it may not be as tender, juicy or flavorful.

To get the best results, be sure to select a cookery method appropriate for the grade and tenderness of the cut.

Let me tell you what else is happening.

The beef industry is continually looking for ways to improve the eating quality of beef. It has been noted that the biggest problem, as voiced by retail consumers, is tenderness consistency. In response, the cattle industry is researching ways to make improvements. An instrument grading machine is currently being developed which will more accurately identify quality grade.

NCA's carcass quality task force has recommended that current technology be evaluated and implemented in order to reduce inconsistency of tenderness.

The technology reviewed includes:

1. "Armour Tenderometer" which reads tenderness from a strain gauge.
2. Product aging for a minimum of 10 days.
3. The rate of carcass cooling and its effect on tenderness.
4. Calcium tenderization procedures — where the addition of calcium to fresh beef aids in increasing tenderness.
5. Electrical carcass stimulation. This aids in quality grading and has the potential to reduce tenderness variability.
6. Calpastatin (Cal past a tin) research and genetic screening.

It is known that enzyme activity in meat during the aging process is related to tenderness. Specifically, the more activity of the enzyme calpain (cal pain), the more tender the meat. Another enzyme exists called calpastatin. It inhibits the activity of calpain. Therefore, the more calpastatin, the tougher the meat.

Just recently researchers have discovered that calpastatin is genetically controlled. This suggests that selection against animals with high calpastatin could improve the consistency of beef tenderness.

Geneticists and meat scientists now claim that with the development of probes to locate the genes affecting calpastatin it will be possible to use DNA typing to screen live animals for the presence of these "tenderness" genes.

When it happens, this could be one of the biggest breakthroughs in beef cattle genetics.

Another area which directly helps consumers enjoy beef is the National Beef Cook-Off®. It attracts contestants who wish to demonstrate recipes they have perfected. Tasty dishes such as, Medallions of Beef Mexicana, Rolled Flank Steak with Orange Sauce or Beef Fondue have been created and shared.

New and helpful preparation tips also make it possible for everyone to enjoy beef. Carving of meat is done across the grain so that chewing is with the grain thus producing optimum tenderness. A sharp knife should be used when carving because a dull knife will actually saw the meat and creates unnecessary fluid loss.

NJAA Speech Winners cont.

Understanding cooking methods, temperatures and cuts of meat are important when making an unforgettable meal.

When you have dinner guests provide them with the most tantalizing main course imaginable. Perhaps: Filet Mignon with Rosemary sauce, Stuffed Beef Tenderloin with Wild Mushrooms, or how about Top Sirloin Stir Fry on Cellophane Noodles... m m m m m m m mgood!

Remember, beef at its best is nutritional, healthful and ... delicious! That's why beef is the right choice.

The Endangered Species

by Bob Stevenson, Hobson, Mont., intermediate division

Who is a cattleman? A cattleman is a caretaker. He cares for the well-being of his animals, the vitality of the land and the future of his family. While tending to his land, animals and natural resources that he uses, he is preserving, conserving and building for the future.

Many of America's farms and ranches of today have been passed down from generation to generation — the cattlemen of today are responsible for preserving the legacy and resources of the industry for cattlemen of the future. But even though cattlemen are doing all of these good things, recent years have brought them trouble. Cattlemen have inherited huge problems; they have fallen prey to animal rights and environmental activists nearly to the point that the American cattleman is becoming the so called "endangered species."

It makes me proud to know that I am in the industry of growing food and part of a business that represents America's greatest industry. That's the cattle business! But the past few years we have been questioned and accused of many things for which we are not responsible. The proper management of livestock grazing land is the best interest for cattlemen to ensure the future of the land, not to mention that grazing is used as a tool to manage brush and weeds. A cattleman's livelihood depends on proper management of livestock grazing lands, thus assuring growth of the valuable resources.

But some people would ask, "Doesn't grazing in the West ruin those arid lands?" This question would simply be answered: American rangelands are in the best condition that they have been in the past 100 years and on the average they are still improving. It is in the cattleman's best interest to ensure that lands are well maintained and that management practices promote the regeneration of those resources so that these ranches will still be productive when our grandchildren are operating them.

It was best said by the Mackey Brothers of Canyon Creek Ranch, Alturas, Calif.: "The idea is not to conquer nature and subdue her, but to work with her and share the harvest."

Water is another big issue with today's cattlemen. They have had many questions to answer such as, "Isn't water use in producing livestock a wasteful use of a natural resource?" When in fact the water used in cattle production is not "consumed" or "used up."



Take for example, water taken by plants later is lost through transpiration and evaporation. Later on it returns to the earth as rain, recycling many times during a growing season. Mature cattle drink 8 to 15 gallons of water per day which eventually returns to the soil as urine.

Now let's take a look at human beings. Most of the water used by humans goes into sewage systems and into oceans and streams before being recycled. Water is the most common substance found on earth. Eighty percent of the earth's surface is covered with water but only 2 percent of it is fresh water.

It takes approximately 7,300 gallons of water to produce an 1,100-pound steer. Some of you will assume that this is a waste of natural resource. However, the average citizen in the United States will use 81,450 gallons of water for all of his needs in one year, plus the fact that it takes more than 40,000 gallons of water for the production of one car.

Cattlemen are not only accused of causing water problems but are also blamed for contributing to the global warming problem. Environmental activists say that cattle put too much methane into the air compared to other animals, which is false. The total methane released to produce an 1,100-pound fed steer is approximately 176 pounds. This steer will yield about 480 pounds of retail product, so the methane production in a quarter-pounder caused by a beef animal would be approximately 1.5 ounces. By comparison of a 12-mile round trip to the store to purchase this hamburger in a well-tuned car with a fuel efficiency rating of 25 m.p.g. will produce 148 ounces (9.25 pounds) of carbon dioxide, or almost 100 times more greenhouse gas than the burger at McDonalds.

That isn't mentioning the complaints about how ranchers and cattlemen are destroying the wildlife. When in fact, more than 80 percent of the wildlife in the United States are dependent on private land for food, water and shelter.

Dave Huston said in an *Agri News* editorial, "We are all enjoying the dry warm weather, but the water deal is tough. The wild game and birds are suffering except where these terrible ranchers are opening waterholes for livestock. When we go to open water, there are deer and birds waiting to get a drink." Further on he says, "In places where nobody has livestock to water, the deer are dying for lack of moisture." Those environmental activists, who have labeled the rancher as "terrible" also forgot to examine the fact that native wildlife numbers are increasing dramatically on these public lands in large measure simply because of management practices used by cattlemen and other public lands permittees. Wildlife is a harvestable, renewable resource.

Jack Turnell, Pitchfork Ranch Co., Meeteetse, Wyo., says, "If you manage it wisely and take care of it, it will take care of you." Now, if wildlife is doing well, the land must be in pretty good shape.

All this controversy has created an opportunity for today's cattlemen and ranchers. We should be very concerned about the rising tide of activism in America today. These groups demonstrate an alarming lack of knowledge of the cattle industry today. It is up to the American cattlemen to educate the public about the cattle industry.

It was best said by President Dwight D. Eisenhower, "As you till your farms, go to school, plan your futures, raise your families . . . remember that only he can deserve America who stands forever ready to give America all he has."

By providing thorough information for implementation in our educational system and news media, we can more effectively inform the consumer, thus, reducing these problems that we are facing.

Preserving and sustaining God's creation is a worthy goal for cattlemen. After all, we all must live on the planet. If we breathe clean air, drink clean water and enjoy pristine landscapes during our allotted time that we have here, so much the

better. But clean air, clean water and scenic beauty are not incompatible with the traditional cattleman's lifestyle. Cattlemen know that the challenge is to convey it to others.

A saying I'm fond of referring to this is: "Only God and his angels can afford to be lookers-on. The rest of us have to participate."

Ladies and gentlemen, fellow stockmen. . . we are the ones that are responsible for thoroughly educating the public so that we will not become the next endangered species.

Beef Quality — What It Means To My Cattle Operation

by Brett Spader, Rosendale, Mo., junior division

Have you wondered what quality means in the beef cattle business? For a long time to the cowman it has meant productive cows that raise a big calf every year; to the feeder it meant gains and feed conversion; and to the consumer it meant a top quality product that helps make a delicious meal.

Those are a few of the things that have been defined as quality for decades. But today, everyone in the cattle industry is taking quality more seriously and redefining the word. The continued criticism of our industry and our beef product by some, has made us all aware that we have a job to do — a responsibility to make our good product even better.

The lifestyles and eating habits of the public have changed dramatically in the past decade. Those concerned with the amount of fat in their diet and healthfulness are demanding a leaner beef product with improved quality and consistency.

So what are we really talking about today when we say quality in our beef operation? Let's take a look.

A 1991 National Beef Quality Audit two years ago estimated that producers and the industry are losing \$279 per head because of inefficiencies in the beef industry. This includes many areas that we as producers can do something about.

First, and most basic of all, cattle producers are in the business of producing beef and protein while using the natural resources around us. That includes land, forages and water. A cow survives on land unsuitable, in many cases, for anything else. She is the ultimate recycler of feed and forage into an edible product.

It is estimated that 80 percent of the nutrients in the lifetime diet of the beef animal — grass, hay, silage and crop residue — cannot be digested and used by humans for nutrition. Therefore, the cow is an important asset to all consumers in the world today.

Our job as beef producers is to see that we offer a healthy and nutritious product to our end users because we have the most at stake -we're consumers, too.



On our farm quality starts with care. Care to us means adequate feed, minerals and fresh water for our cattle. Just like ourselves, cattle can't grow and remain healthy if they don't have care. That includes proper shelter from the elements and a basic and balanced diet for growth and health.

When handling cattle, we see that handling facilities are well maintained and properly designed for the type of work being done. The chance of costly bruising and overly stressed animals can be eliminated with good chutes, corrals — and a little patience.

Like humans, cattle are exposed to diseases and illness. A routine herd health practice with immunization for different diseases is a must. We work with our local veterinarian to see that all injections he recommends are done in a timely way. In order to guarantee a quality end product, most shots are now given under the skin, on the neck and not into the muscle. Records are also kept on all medication given to our cattle so we can comply with withdrawal guidelines. This is one big way that cattlemen can guarantee a quality end product. It's not machines and computers that care for animals — people do.

Another means of improving our product is through genetics. Never before have producers had so many tools to work with. This includes performance records that help make genetic improvement. The tools available, including growth and carcass expected progeny differences (EPDs), help us define our goals and aim for the kind and type of cattle that will meet these specifications.

One main objective with genetic input is to reduce the amount of variation in our product. As producers, our job is to identify the kind of Angus that help us produce a consistent, quality product and then produce these cattle in large numbers. Eliminating inconsistency is one place that producers can have a large impact.

Members of the beef industry are participating in a nationwide effort to reduce fat production in beef. In fact, genetics and closer trimming by retailers has reduced the amount of fat by 27 percent in just two years.

To help accomplish this goal, the American Angus Association and the National Cattlemen's Association started a carcass data collection service that helps cattlemen accumulate important carcass information about their cattle. In my small herd of cows, we use top, proven bulls that help make this genetic improvement.

The "war on fat" is one in which everyone wins. Consumers win by obtaining leaner, more healthful products at lower costs. Producers win by producing more desirable products more efficiently. And the beef industry and Americans win by being more competitive.

Beef producers and our farm also participate in a statewide Beef Assurance Program. This includes a monitoring of all aspects of production and marketing to guarantee healthy, well cared for animals. Today 34 states have a Beef Quality Assurance program.

In a recent presentation, Robert Thompson from Purdue University said, "Today the consumer reigns supreme and the consumer demands safety, nutrition and convenience from our food system. Consumers want meat with more protein and less fat, no risk of pesticide or drug residue and convenience."

Our challenge is to continue to improve our management practices in any way we can. We can be proud of the job we are doing as producers. In the future we'll strive and I'll strive even harder to offer consumers the best product in the meat industry — a delicious, nutritious Angus beef dinner.

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