

JUNIORS HAVE THEIR SAY

These three speeches topped their respective divisions in the NJAS public speaking contest.

JUNIOR DIVISION

WHY CHECKOFF?

BY GARRETT LAMPE

You've read the headlines. You might have heard it on "Oprah."

"Beef is unsafe."

"Red meat should be limited — or better yet, eliminated — in a healthy diet."

How can we as beef producers combat these statements and educate the public about our nutritious, safe product?

No, we can't stop it. However, we can meet it head-on and counteract it with positive, factual, researched information. In fact, beef producers have been cooperatively doing this for over a decade. This cooperative effort is called the beef checkoff. Thousands of cattlemen and women in the United States support the checkoff;

however, in recent years it has come up against much opposition by industry groups.

The beef industry has to contend with enough negative, opposing groups and information without creating fighting within our industry. To continue to be a strong industry, we must be a united industry.

Today I will speak in favor of the \$1 beef checkoff and the programs and publicity it has created in the past 11 years. I will discuss the history, organizational structure and programs of the beef checkoff.

Let's start with the history of the checkoff. The Beef Promotion and Research Act (BPRA) was passed as part of the 1985 Farm Bill. As required by the act, the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) conducted a referendum among all cattle producers and importers.

Over 250,000 ballots were cast on May 10, 1988. An overwhelming 78.91% of beef producers and importers favored the program. Thus a mandatory assessment of \$1 per head is collected each time cattle are

sold. All producers owning and marketing beef and veal cattle must pay the assessment.

The checkoff program is administered by the Cattlemen's Beef Promotion and Research Board. The involved organizations and their responsibilities are:

- The state beef councils collect the checkoff dollars and, in turn, retain 50¢ of every dollar to conduct and implement programs in their own states which are consistent with the BPRA.
- Another organization in the structure is the Beef Industry Council (BIC). The BIC, formed in 1963, is the federation of state beef councils and a division of the National Livestock and Meat Board.
- Also included is the Beef Board created by the Beef Promotion and Research Act. The Beef Board consists of producers nominated by state beef producers, organizations and importers, all of whom are appointed by the U.S. secretary of agriculture.
- And finally, in the organizational structure is the operating committee, also created by the BPRA. The operating committee is a 20-member committee that develops plans and budgets.

With representation from the Beef Board, state beef councils and the Beef Industry Council, the entire checkoff dollar comes together in a coordinated state/national program.

So, how is the checkoff dollar invested?

First, the checkoff dollar is invested in research, which provides the foundation for all checkoff-funded activity. Investments are made in promotion, which encompasses print and media advertising, merchandising and in-store promotions that enhance the appeal of beef to the consumer.

Checkoff funds also go to consumer information, which creates a positive image of beef. Cooperative marketing efforts are being conducted between the Beef Council and retail and foodservice businesses.

New-product development has been focused on extensively in the past few years. Industry information is also provided through checkoff dollars. Factual, researched



Winners in the junior division of the public speaking contest are (l to r) **Garrett Lampe**, Scott City, Kan., first; **Kristin Oaks**, Calhoun, La., second; and **Kara Wilson**, Orleans, Ind., third.

information improves the perceptions and understanding of the cattle industry as well.

Programs designed to manage misleading publicity concerning beef are funded by the checkoff. The dollar works to increase the beef demand in foreign markets.

Finally, funds are invested in producer communications, which informs the beef and veal producer about how checkoff dollars are being invested.

When asked the question, "Why is there a beef checkoff, and what is it?" I can now answer. Beef producers created the checkoff as a self-help program to build a demand for beef.

It's fair. Every importer and producer pays.

It's grassroots. State beef councils control half of each dollar collected and spend it according to priorities set by beef producers in their state.

It's producer-controlled. National board members are nominated by fellow beef producers on the state level.

It's cost-effective. The checkoff dollar adds up to about \$80 million annually. Of that, the administrative costs are capped at 5%.

Next question. Does it work?

I'm not saying that it is perfect. But, despite the increased popularity of poultry and strong advertising by the pork industry, beef is maintaining a dominance in meat cases and on menus. Beef is the meat of choice when Americans go out to eat.

New, quick, ready-to-eat beef products have been developed. Beef is being increasingly recognized by health authorities for its nutritional value. Checkoff supporters believe that accurate information, promotion and a good product are the keys to success in the beef industry.

Our checkoff works as a catalyst for change. No, it cannot turn a bad market around. But the checkoff has created funds for direct advertising, cooperative marketing, public relations efforts, safety research, beef education programs and new-product development.

Because of the \$1 beef checkoff, pot roast is now fast food. Millions of kids are seeing how beef belongs in a healthy, balanced diet. Consumers are hearing positive beef nutrition messages. Foreign markets are growing, and consumer confidence in beef safety is well-deserved.

So I say, fellow cattlemen and women, let's stop spending our time and resources arguing whether or not there should be a beef checkoff.

The step was taken in the right direction over 10 years ago. Let's continue in that direction for the future success of our industry. The beef industry.

INTERMEDIATE DIVISION



BY KRISTI WILSON

"Beef, yuck! That isn't healthy for me!"

"An animal? No way! I would never use anything from an innocent cow."

"Beef, well, it just doesn't taste very good."

"Those beef producers are so bad for our environment!"

Talk about uninformed! These are common myths we cattle producers often hear. Today I would like to explain to you just how wrong these misconceptions are.

"Beef, yuck! That isn't healthy for me! I've heard it clogs your arteries."

Beef fits well in a healthy diet. There are actually seven different cuts of beef that have the same low-fat content as skinless chicken breast. These cuts are eye of round, top round, round tip, top sirloin, bottom round, top loin and tenderloin.

Recently the Center for Disease Control stated that the most common deficiency in the United States is iron deficiency. They also said the best way to prevent this is by eating plenty of foods that are rich in readily absorbable iron. Beef is one of the best sources of absorbable iron. It is also the most common practical source of zinc.

Not only is beef nutritional; it also has great quality assurance. Since 1993 the beef industry has spent \$8.4 million on *E. coli* research to ensure the purity and safety of beef products.

"An animal? No way! I would never use anything from an innocent cow."

We use many cattle byproducts everyday that we don't even think about. How many diabetics could go without their insulin shots? How many cars could run without antifreeze or tire lubrication? Leather is used for several things from shoes and belts to baseball gloves, footballs and basketballs. We also use soap, glue, gelatin, photographic film, explosives and fire retardant. These are all common items we could easily find, but beef byproducts are also making tremendous breakthroughs in the medical field.

The quality of life for a 13-month-old boy was greatly improved, thanks to a beef byproduct. The boy was born with only one

heart valve. A valve from a cow's neck was successfully transplanted into his heart. Many diabetics use insulin, which comes from a gland in cattle. Other chemical byproducts are used to treat low blood sugar, help heal burns, and are used as anti-inflammatory agents. These are all very important beef byproducts that many people would never think of, but would never want to think of going without.

"Beef, well, it just doesn't taste very good."

Lately the beef industry has been paying close attention to taste. The Certified Angus Beef Program is proof of this. In 1976 the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) lowered the standards for Choice beef. Following this relaxation of standards, restaurants and purveyors complained about inconsistent quality.

In response to this, the Certified Angus Beef Program was created. This program has very high, strict standards that regulate the quality of beef. Some of these standards are modest to higher degree of marbling (to enhance juiciness and flavor), USDA Yield Grade 3.9 or leaner, medium to fine marbling texture, and free of dark-cutting characteristics. The standards for *Certified Angus Beef*[™] [product] are so strict that only one out of every six eligible carcasses meet the regulations to be labeled *Certified Angus Beef* [product]. [The] *Certified Angus Beef* [brand] ensures a great eating experience.

"Those beef producers are so bad for our environment."

Beef producers are very environmentally conscious. We use many programs to keep our fields healthy. Rotational grazing allows a pasture to completely recover after the cattle have grazed it. We also rotate crops so that nutrients can be returned to the soil. This also helps fight pests without the use of chemicals. In particular, farmers in our region of southern Indiana have done lots of work to prevent erosion of our already sparse topsoil.

The USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service reported that, in the past 10 years, water erosion on cropland has been reduced 24%. Practices such as planting legumes on hillsides and grazing cattle, rather than planting crops on land that would easily erode if plowed, have helped in this. Face it; without cattle to use this pasture, the land would be much less valuable.

Many farmers and ranchers use methods such as buffer strips, grass waterways, filter strips, contour grass strips and riparian zones along streams. They have found that

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these practices enhance water quality and improve wildlife habitat.

For the past several years the *Angus Journal* has promoted conservation through its "Stewards of the Land" contest. This program promotes conservation practices, environmental awareness and educational efforts.

So you see, these assumptions about health, byproducts, quality and environment can be set straight. We need to support programs such as barnyard carnivals for elementary children to help educate them as to how important agriculture is to our future. Ag Day dinners and other similar programs bring urban and rural residents together to share concerns and insights on common issues such as urban sprawl and zoning.

Let's work together so that we can all be well-informed.

SENIOR DIVISION

HOW CAN THE BEEF INDUSTRY DEVELOP DEMAND IN THE FUTURE?

BY NICOLE LONG

The beef industry is a time-honored industry in America that all Americans can trust. As an industry approaching the new millennium, we need to build on that trust and give consumers more reasons to buy beef.

The beef industry has worked to educate the producer, the consumer and the media on the improvements of beef since the beginning of the beef checkoff program. This has instilled faith into the beef industry and has provided a more positive image. But always remember, as producers, our future and livelihood depend on the consumer. Furthermore, let us not forget our consumers of today and in the future — the youth of America.

Today's youth have less knowledge about proper cooking techniques and often stick to the easily prepared cuts of meat or find the nearest drive-through. So, how can the beef industry develop demand in the future?

The beef industry needs to continue to focus on educating the producer and the consumer, applying technology as it becomes available, and continuing to produce a consistent, high-quality, safe

product to stabilize demand in the upcoming decade and meet the changing needs of the consumer.

Life today is hectic, with 70% of women in the workforce and both men and women working extended hours. We live in a fast-paced world where dinner decisions are made on the same day and, usually, only minutes before dinnertime. These time-pressed consumers presently enjoy the new "heat-and-serve" meals for taste, value and, most importantly, convenience.

The beef industry needs to continue to expand into the convenience-food industry by utilizing fast-food chains and providing more beef in the frozen-food section.

Let's talk quality. The No. 1 thing that consumers look for in a product is quality. Today that need is being met through programs like the Beef Quality Assurance (BQA) program where cattlemen are educated on proper beef management techniques. The BQA also encourages beef producers to view carcasses and carcass evaluations in order to implement carcass data when selecting cattle and making breeding decisions. This will also help with the uniformity of the product on a larger scale.

The BQA program needs to be expanded to bring in more people at all levels of production to help reduce variation and ensure quality that the consumer wants and craves. We need to reach not only the producer, but the feeder, packer, foodservice distributor, retailer and consumer as well.

Every sector must work together to solve the challenges related to food safety while providing a tender, high-quality product. Chefs and consumers must be educated so that beef is properly prepared in restaurants, as well as at home.

There will always be the application of technology to protect the consumer as well. After a recent foodservice was found with bacteria, consumers viewed beef as a heartless industry and, worse yet, an unsafe one.

In response, the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) developed new sanitation requirements that include stiffer inspections for fecal contamination and tests for *E. coli*. Prior to this, meat packers visually inspected carcasses for fecal contamination, which left room for human error. Now scientists have developed a new handheld detector that can illuminate unseen fecal contamination.



Winners in the intermediate division of the public speaking contest are (l to r) **Kristi Wilson**, Orleans, Ind., first; **Abbe Price**, Decatur, Ark., second; and **Christy Williams**, Lavaca, Ark., third.

These and other developments, such as irradiation, used on beef products need to be publicized to ensure the consumer's trust.

When the news was released that beef would be treated with irradiation to remove impurities, customers were concerned about effects of radiation. Few consumers knew that radiation had been used on fruits and vegetables for years. The nation needs to be informed about safety precautions and steps the beef industry has taken to become a trustworthy industry.

There is also endless information available on the World Wide Web, or Internet, that can be easily accessed through www.beef.org, which provides information on cooking meats properly and even how to choose meats when at the grocery store.

Furthermore, consumers need to know about the steps that the ranches and cattlemen have made to take unified leaps toward a consistent product. An example of these steps is the growth of alliances. Beef alliances operate on a system that assigns premiums based on individual market quality where uniformity is desired. The higher the quality of the product, the more profit for the beef producer.

Alliances are now a spreading trend, as the benefits are numerous because feed, supplies and medical equipment can be bought in bulk. This formation of alliances will actually threaten the livelihood of the "middleman" and give a larger profit to the producer.

Other meat industries, such as the poultry industry, have taken initiative early and have successfully developed uniformity and consistency in their product. However, in the beef industry there are many variables, such as breed and environment, that lead to an inconsistent product.

Currently, the tenderness between cuts varies significantly. It has been reported by the National Beef Quality Audit that three out of four steaks are considered desirable. You might think that this is a good average, but realistically, four out of four steaks should be desirable.

They also found that a single tough beef carcass could affect as many as 542 consumers. That would be equivalent to all of the shoppers who purchase meat at my local grocery store for two days!

Experts agree that the only way for beef to hold onto market share is by the production of products consistent in



Winners in the *Angus Journal*-sponsored senior division of the public speaking contest are (l to r) **Nicole Long**, Berryville, Va., first; **Jennifer Scharpe**, Arlington, Minn., second; and **Jamie Meyer**, Douglass, Kan., third. Each year the NJAA Board, along with *Angus Journal* staff, selects a topic for the speech contest. "How can the beef industry develop demand in the future?" was this year's topic.

portion, tenderness and taste that suit consumers' desires while being raised economically or at a cost-effective level.

There is technology invested in finding gene markers for tenderness, as well as the use of ultrasound on live animals to measure marbling levels within top-producing cattle. Furthermore, with the identification of the location of the genes for tenderness, they may be manipulated so that consistency is genetically ensured. Even advancements in cloning could be used.

I suggest the beef industry develop a reliable expected progeny difference (EPD) for tenderness as they have for other carcass traits. I also suggest that the beef industry manipulate technology as it becomes available to help select against toughness and other undesirable traits.

Bill Turner of Texas A&M University believes the Angus cow will have a big advantage for a period of time because of the emphasis on carcass merit. The beef industry needs to further carcass evaluations and to educate and encourage producers to implement carcass data when making breeding decisions. A cow herd with genetic

consistency improves the uniformity of the resulting calf crop, which is a definite marketing advantage.

In conclusion, the beef industry has the goal of stabilizing beef demand by the year 2001. The beef industry must realize that they need to provide a more convenient, higher quality, more consistent product that will satisfy the consumers.

In order to stabilize demand and provide a sustaining livelihood for the beef producer, the beef industry must meet the demands of today's consumer by providing a convenient, consistent, safe and wholesome high-quality product.

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