



# BRANDED

**Beef. It's what's been for dinner for years and what will continue to be for dinner as branding programs of the beef industry shift to match the demands of consumers.**

*by Megan Silveira, editorial intern*

Sitting astride horses so eager for the day's work that their nostrils are already flaring, and holding tightly to thermoses full of strong coffee, a group of denim-clad men adjust their straw cowboy hats. Sweat already runs down their faces, the heat of the fire crackling off to the side adding warmth to the morning air.

The cattle have already sniffed the flames and now watch as irons are heated in the flickering fire. Calves shift restlessly in the corrals, silently watching as the cattlemen get to work.

Branding has become a fairly popular day for all ranchers, as it gives them a chance to work up a sweat while placing their mark on the product of a year's hard work.

But in today's world, cattle aren't the only ones being branded. In fact, the beef industry itself has been branded. Slogans, logos and campaigns have all been imprinted on the industry in an effort to make beef more approachable in the eyes of consumers.

"We have to serve information to consumers that they want and need through various platforms at various moments in time, look at how they're responding to the content and messaging, and continuously refine it to ensure that we're breaking through to consumers," says Season Solorio,

senior executive director of brand marketing and communications for the National Cattlemen's Beef Association (NCBA).

## What's for dinner?

Beef. Seriously.

The Beef. It's What's for Dinner. campaign has arguably become one of the most successful and well-known brands in the beef industry. Almost nothing is quite as iconic as Sam Elliott's smooth voice telling consumers to eat beef followed by the West's theme song by Aaron Copland, "Hoedown."

"One of the most recognized advertising campaigns in history is more than a slogan," says Martin Roth, executive director, creative and digital media for NCBA. "It is a statement that, for more than 25 years, has captured the sentiment of many American consumers: beef is the premier protein choice for any eating occasion."

NCBA, a contractor to the Beef Checkoff program, launched the first ad campaign featuring this slogan in May 1992. From "A-list celebrities" starring as a family desperate for a high-quality beef dinner to the orchestration of "Hoedown" playing in the background, this commercial certainly made an impression.

The brand accomplished a lot for the industry, becoming a nationally recognized slogan people could comprehend, whether or not they came from an agricultural background.

Roth explains the campaign moved from t.v. commercials to radio, to digital and print ads as the beef budget contracted. While he says the brand has managed to remain at 55% total awareness today, a need recently arose for the brand to be redefined.

## Changing consumers

Rebranding beef stemmed from the changing demands of consumers. Back when the first ads were launched, Roth explains how the brand was designed to build consumers' confidence in terms of selecting, preparing and serving beef products.

Nowadays, however, customers have begun demanding even more from the beef industry.

"Consumers today want it all," Solorio explains. "They want food that tastes great, that is raised responsibly and that is good for them, and they're choosing beef as a food that can deliver on all these expectations."

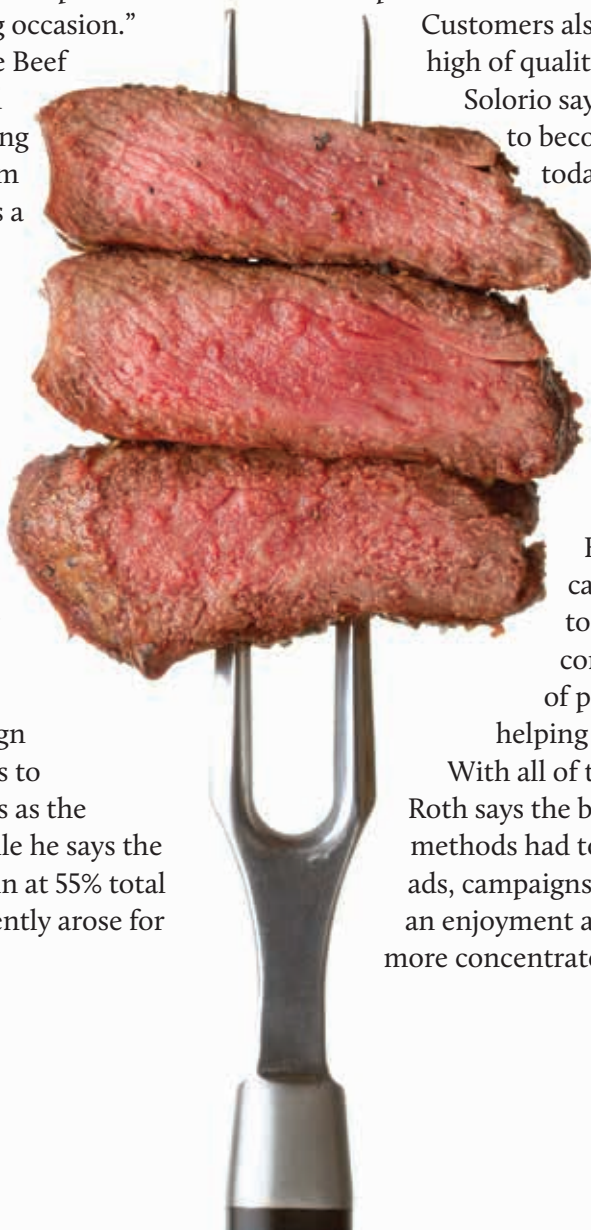
Roth says customers expect to be provided with more information on beef, including how cattle are raised and information on the nutritional values of the products.

Customers also expect ranchers to be of as high of quality as the beef they're producing.

Solorio says the beef industry has evolved to become more transparent, as today's consumer wants to interact with individuals producing the items they put into their shopping carts.

And at the end of the day, consumers expect communication from producers to come from more than just a television commercial. Solorio says the Beef. It's What's for Dinner. campaign has always attempted to "transcend generations," and connecting through a variety of platforms is one way they are helping to accomplish this goal.

With all of these new consumer demands, Roth says the beef industry's communication methods had to shift as well. The focus of the ads, campaigns and slogans had to move from an enjoyment and culinary focus to become more concentrated on "deepening the brand's



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relevance across all things beef.” This shift required more than a few tweaks. According to Roth, the entire Beef. It’s What’s for Dinner. campaign needed to be rebranded.

## Defining the future

The campaign has three pillars it now needs to emphasize: people, protein and pleasure. Roth describes the pillars of the three-year rebranding plan, saying the campaign will revolve around showcasing real, hard-working ranchers, highlighting beef as a necessity in a healthy diet and reinforcing consumers’ passion for beef products.

Roth says the campaign’s first three months of the brand relaunch centered around the first pillar: people.

The brand chose an “anthem” for their efforts and the beef industry. With the familiar “Old McDonald had a Farm” tune modernized, the Beef Checkoff program is working to capture the support of customers across the country, explains Solorio.

“Our goal was to help audiences ‘Rethink the Ranch’ by informing consumers that the ‘Old McDonald’ of today has adopted innovative ways that improve production practices, enabling ranchers to raise wholesome beef in a safe and humane way,” Roth says.

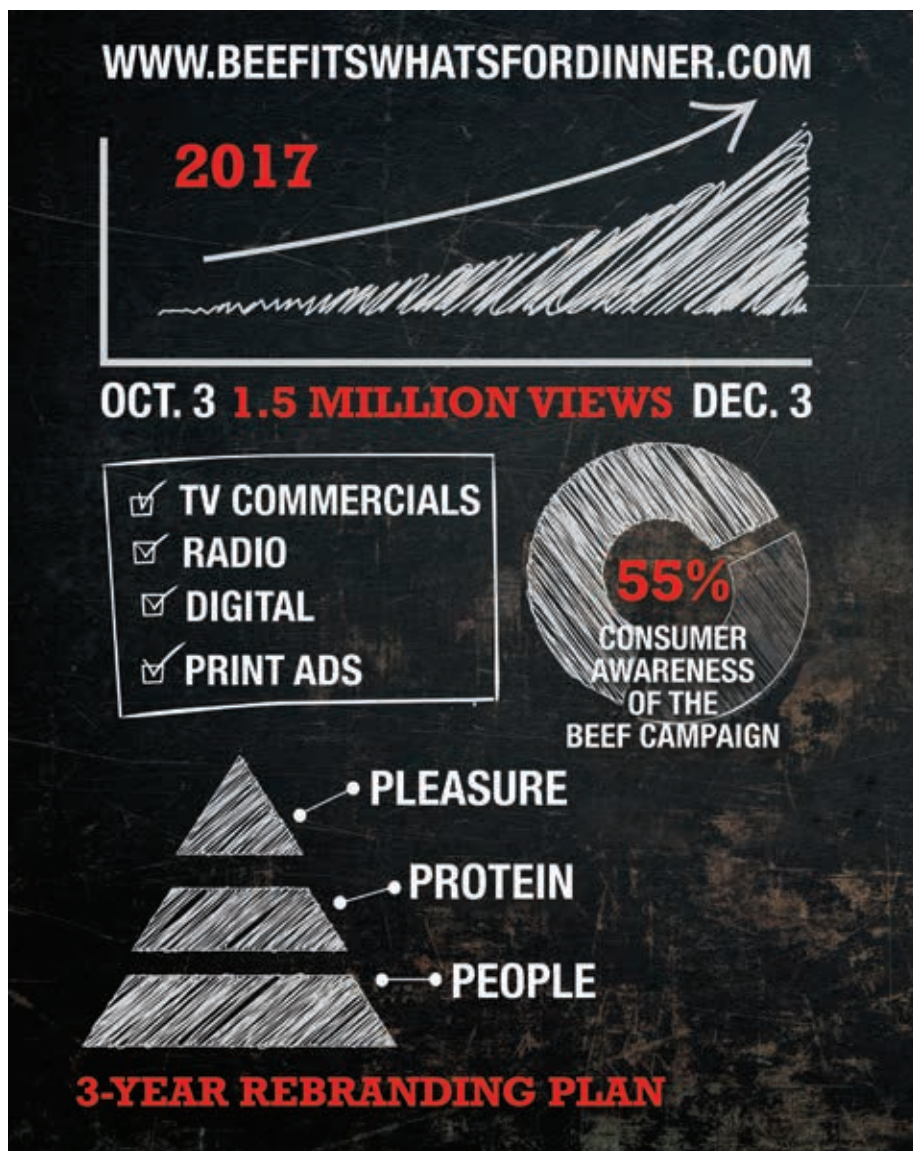
In addition to increasing the positivity consumers associated with cattle ranchers, he says the hope was to reestablish the Beef. It’s What’s for Dinner. brand as the information hub for individuals wishing to understand the production process.

The rebranding of such an iconic slogan was not simple. First, Roth says a “host of newly redesigned and

rebranded communication elements were created.” These included a new, more modern logo and a reimagined website containing a compilation of eight of the beef industry’s biggest websites.

Roth explains an extensive amount of advertising was next, exposing consumers to this new campaign on several media fronts. From video series to exciting recipes, consumers were given several ways to reconnect with the beef industry.

To provide the most effective advertising, Solorio says Beef. It’s What’s for Dinner. went entirely digital in 2014. This move helped reach a key target of Beef Checkoff programs, millennials, a generation



that spends on average 50 hours online per week.

The idea behind going digital was to keep up with current demands. The brand realized the success it had making the big change and decided to take another risk in the spring of 2018.

“We did something unexpected by showcasing how beef can turn cowboys into ninjas by working with Lance Pekus, a cow-calf rancher from Salmon, Idaho,” Solorio says. “Lance has been competing on the popular reality show, American Ninja Warrior, for many years, and fans across the country have become drawn to his story of ranching, family and strength.”

A chance to showcase those core values found in Lance’s operation, which mirrors many U.S. cattle ranches, was too good of an opportunity to pass up.

All these actions are designed to reaffirm in consumers’ minds beef is the top protein, and the beef industry is one capable of meeting their demands.

## Best boot forward

The relaunch has certainly proven to meet the expectations of today’s consumers. From Oct. 3 to Dec. 3, 2017, the new website tracked more than 1.5 million views, far exceeding expectations.

Consumers’ perception of the beef industry has improved, as well. Roth says with the use of a nationally representative sample of 1,000 consumers for each wave, the percent of consumers agreeing with the statement “I trust the people that raise beef” has grown from 40% to 46% during this campaign. And with the statement “beef is raised responsibly,” consumers’ agreement has grown from 41% to 47%.

Solorio says the key to success with the beef industry is staying persistent. Consumers will always desire to know more about producers and beef products, so cattlemen, as advocates, need to be willing to share their knowledge.

The Beef. It’s What’s for Dinner. brand has found success by adapting and listening to the demands of consumers.

With this just being the start, there is no doubt cattlemen are certainly putting their best boot forward. Consumers want to get to know the real people behind the beef industry. It’s time for cattlemen to brand the industry wear their boots with pride. 