

YOUR VIEW

by Bridger Gordon



Positively addressing consumer concerns about beef

“I just can’t eat meat,” remarked one of my college classmates recently. Having been raised on a ranch and involved with cattle and agriculture all my life, this statement definitely got my attention.

I was about to recite all the reasons meat — especially beef — is beneficial, from protein and iron to zinc and B vitamins, when the mantra “First seek to understand, then to be understood” popped into my head. At that moment, I decided to simply listen to my classmate, and possibly approach her with my own viewpoint at another time.

As I walked away from that brief conversation, I pondered the numerous consumer concerns within our current beef industry. While there are various viewpoints, to me the most pressing concern for beef’s future are consumers choosing *not* to eat meat. I recognize without continued beef consumption, our industry can’t grow and flourish and have opportunities for the next generation.

Consumers’ reasons for avoiding meat are varied — from beliefs that beef and other animal proteins are not good for your health to feelings that animals are not humanely cared for — or should not be eaten because they have similar rights to humans. More recently, the belief that livestock production has too large of an environmental impact has been cited among the reasons people

choose a meatless lifestyle. Some people say they became vegetarians because they don’t like the taste or texture of meat; others have made the choice — especially teenagers and college students — because it makes them popular or trendy among their peers.

I feel the best solution to address the negativity toward beef is a focused effort on consumer education. Without consumer support and understanding, the beef industry will not be able to maintain its social license to operate in the future. — Bridger Gordon

How can I — and others — positively address this issue? It is a daunting task, but I believe if each person commits to being informed about the beef industry, listens to others, and shares positive messages, collectively we can ensure a brighter future for the beef industry; as President Ronald Reagan said: “We can’t help everyone, but everyone can help someone.”

While each of the various reasons that consumers drift away from eating meat/beef may appear to be seemingly different issues, I

feel they stem from one primary root cause: the rural-urban divide that exists in America — and really around the world. Because the vast majority of today’s population is two or more generations removed from production agriculture, they no longer have a practical understanding of beef production and land stewardship. And, because of the upper socio-economic status of many Americans and other global consumers, they tend to be selective — and vocal — about their food production choices. In turn, this has created a society that pits one production practice or system as good versus another as bad — rather than advocating for acceptance of producer and consumer choice in food production to sustainably feed the world.

I feel the best solution to address the negativity toward beef is a focused effort on consumer education. Without consumer support and understanding, the beef industry will not be able to maintain its social license to operate in the future. Most importantly, as consumers gain knowledge and understanding about beef production and the health benefits

of high-protein beef their support for beef consumption should be sustained — or hopefully rise or return if they haven't eaten meat in a while.

I believe social media is an important tool for each of us to share positive stories about beef. But it must also be supplemented with face-to-face outreach. And, to provide beef information in an effective manner, we must all be educated and informed about our product. I've been fortunate to be involved in 4-H, FFA and National Junior Angus programs that have helped me increase my knowledge about beef nutrition for health and beef production practices that benefit land stewardship. I am also aware that the National Cattlemen's Beef Association (NCBA) offers the Master's of Beef Advocacy (MBA) to help teach the beef community how to better advocate for their industry.

That effort must continue, but I feel it needs greater visibility and greater numbers. Ideas to consider might include regional MBA teams that attend or present at consumer events, and particularly on college campuses; partnering with 4-H, FFA, cattle breed associations and collegiate programs to train more MBA graduates; hosting an online forum and regular e-newsletter that consumers can sign up for to receive beef industry information. I've witnessed the success that can come from these efforts in my home state of South Dakota where the soybean association is using checkoff funds for a program called Hungry for Truth, which has been successful in creating dialogue with consumers about support for GMO technology and other production practices.

Additionally, each of us in the beef industry needs to continuously invite consumers and elected officials to beef industry events — from ranch tours to conventions and conferences.

That's exactly what I did when I saw my college classmate a few days later. I approached her and mentioned that I had heard her concerns over eating meat and how livestock production was not good for the environment. I shared with her that my family has been ranching for five generations, and if she'd like to visit the farm and learn more about what we do and how we do care for the land and animals, I'd enjoy giving her a tour. I told her to think about it and get back to me sometime. While she has not yet asked to visit the farm, at least I've left the proverbial farm gate open.

Albert Einstein said, "We can't solve problems by using the same kind of thinking we used when we created them." As the beef industry looks toward the future, I believe we must keep this mantra top of mind. Innovation, creativity and a willingness to try new outreach and communication efforts with the public will be essential to ensuring a strong future for the beef industry.

I recognize that beef production can be challenging — from the physical work to the stress of finances, weather, markets and estate transfer. However, we won't face any of those challenges if we don't first address the public's perception and acceptance of the beef industry — and consumption of our product. We must take the approach of making consumers our partners in beef production, so that one day the livestock care, land stewardship and healthy, nutritious beef that beef

producers bring to the world are celebrated and championed.

Finally, amongst the beef community I believe producers — no matter what production system or breed they raise — must find common, respectful ground in working together, supporting each other, and reaching out to consumers. The beef industry's future will be better if producers are unified. **AJ**

Editor's note: This essay was submitted to the 2019 National Junior Angus Show creative writing contest. Bridger Gordon, Whitewood, S.D., won first place in the senior division.

WEEKS

Angus Farm

SELLING 200 HEAD
SATURDAY 11:00 A.M.
DECEMBER 7, 2019
MADISON COUNTY LIVESTOCK AUCTION
WINTERSET, IOWA

COMPLETE DISPERSION

OF EVERY COW 3 YRS OLD & UP & HER 2019 CALF

THIS DISPERSION INCLUDES OUR ANNUAL 2020 SPRING BULL SALE & HEIFER CALVES

- 40 BULL CALF PAIRS • 40 HEIFER CALF PAIRS
- 10 FALL BRED SPRING PAIRS • 3 HERD BULLS
- 10 SINGLE BULL CALVES • 10 SINGLE HEIFER CALVES

FEATURED SIRES: FAR Long Range • SydGen Enhance Deer Valley Growth Fund • PA Fortitude 2500 Baldrige Colonel C251 • Connealy Glory



This SydGen CC&7 daughter earned Pathfinder® status with a progeny NR 4@106. She produced the \$6900 top-selling bull in 2015 and currently boasts a \$M in the top 15% and \$C in the top 20%. She is carrying a heifer calf estimated due 3/7/20 to PA Commando 684.



A Bon View New Design 878 daughter from a Connealy Thunder dam that posts progeny ratios of NR 5@102 and YR 2@104 with a calving interval of 354 days. Her 2018 daughter by "Colonel" will be retained. She was again mated to Baldrige Colonel C251 and is due 2/16/20 carrying a heifer calf.



TC Aberdeen 759 sired this productive mother of the top-selling heifers of the 2017 and 2018 Weeks Angus Production Sales. Her daughter that also sells brought two sons to the auction averaging \$4000. She is ultrasound estimated due 2/5/20 to SydGen Enhance carrying a bull calf.



Two sons of this SydGen CC&7 daughter sold for an average of \$4900. Four daughters will be featured in the sale as well. She sells mated to SydGen Enhance carrying a herd bull prospect due 2/14/20.



A Pathfinder® dam by SAV 8180 Traveler 004 with a NR 5@106, YR 4@109 and 360-day calving interval. Six sons of this prolific cow have sold at an average of \$4566 for a total of \$27,400 in progeny sales. She is carrying twin heifer calves that are estimated due 3/2/20 and sired by TC Irish 2117.



This low BW daughter of Mogk Bullseye has a BR 2@80 and NR 2@101 and produced sons in Weeks Bull Sales at \$3100 and \$3900. Vet examined safe and due to Connealy Glory on 2/9/20 carrying a heifer calf.



This Pathfinder® dam by TC One Way 8159 posts NR 5@105 on AHIR. She produced the top-selling heifer in 2019 and has progeny sales totaling \$10,850. She carries the promising service of Connealy Glory, due 2/13/20 with a heifer calf.



This LaGrand Bismarck 0084 has a progeny record of BR 3@93, NR 3@106 and 363 day calving interval, earning Pathfinder® status. Vet examined safe with a heifer calf due on 2/19/20 to FAR Long Range.



This TC Irish 2117 daughter posts enviable progeny ratios of BR 2@95, NR 2@103 and YR 2@105. Her sons sold at \$3800 and \$4100 in 2018 and 2019 respectively. She was thoughtfully mated to Connealy Power Tool 888A due 2/28/20 carrying a heifer calf.

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