

Top 10 positive beef industry actions

It's sure been an interesting fall, hasn't it? Headlines in nearly every livestock publication in the country have proclaimed historically high beef prices. Reports of isolated lots of cattle breaking the \$120-per-hundredweight (cwt.) price barrier have filled some producers' minds with visions of wealth. Others have come to the stark realization that "for every action there is an equal and opposite reaction."

In beef's favor

All would agree that the fluctuations in the market have perhaps been more volatile in the beginning of the current cycle than we have observed in the past. However, we are dealing with a completely different set of circumstances — not only in this country, but also from a global standpoint. Given time, the rules of supply and demand and capitalism will ensure that a balanced market returns, and, in the interim, Angus breeders have good reason for optimism.

Regardless of the state of the market, beef has enjoyed a rise in demand in recent months. Several factors have contributed to this change in consumer attitude.

The tragedy that beset America and the world two years ago created economic chaos within global financial communities. The end result was a stale economy, which was intensified by a drought that devastated many regions. These factors contributed to a chain reaction, during which time the national cow

herd was depleted, and, hence, fewer cattle were on feed. Simply put, supply was down.

By early fall, the market began to respond to many positive actions that occurred in the recent past and those that are occurring now. I think these positive actions have a lot to do with the current prosperity of the beef cattle market and the things we're enjoying right now in the beef industry.

Top 10

Please remember that I'm no David Letterman, but I've identified 10 things to which I feel this success can be attributed:

1. The efforts of the Cattlemen's Beef Board (CBB) and beef checkoff dollars, the National Cattlemen's Beef Association (NCBA), Certified Angus Beef LLC (CAB) and many other organizations. Their work in both consumer and product research, product development, and consumer marketing has reconstructed the image of beef as a

wholesome, nutritious food product. The slogan "Beef. It's What's for Dinner" has become a household phrase and has achieved top-of-mind awareness with consumers.

2. New product development research, much of which was sponsored by beef checkoff dollars, has led to more than 300 new products being placed on the market, according to media sources. The folks at CAB have also played an important part in this effort.
3. The retail sector is doing a much better job of providing beef in more attractive packages that include detailed cooking instructions. In many instances, creative and delicious recipes entice consumers right there at the beef counter.
4. The prominence of CAB and other high-quality, branded Angus programs has created tremendous consumer awareness of the differences in beef quality. Consumers are learning that all beef is not created equal and that quality beef offers them a better eating experience.
5. Ultrasound technology has provided producers with a noninvasive means of measuring, characterizing and perpetuating genetics for desirable increases in beef quality and lean yield.
6. Alliances and data management systems such as the Beef Record Service (BRS) and AngusSource have provided commercial producers a means to gather, store and analyze information relative to management and genetics, which will, in turn, enable them to market a more consistent product.
7. Beef Quality Assurance (BQA) programs encouraged by our universities and

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REGIONAL MANAGERS—Refer to page 109.

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For a CAB staff listing, refer to page 54.

Extension services, NCBA, feeders, packers and state-based producer groups have led to vast improvements in feeding and management on the ranch and in the feedyard.

8. Advances in processing technology at the packer level have provided techniques to improve food safety, tenderness and palatability of beef and beef products before they even hit the stores.
9. The Atkins Diet has emphasized low carbohydrates and high protein, having a profound effect on the image of beef as a "health food."
10. Industry-wide acceptance of Angus genetics in commercial herds has allowed producers to use a broad range of performance information when making breeding decisions and to bring cow herds back to moderation. The Angus influence has played an important role in that effort.

In years to come

All in all, the beef industry took into account and paid attention to consumer concerns, and producers are now reaping the rewards.

Should we be content? Not by a long shot. There is still much to be done with respect to education, both on the part of producers and consumers. We have learned from our past mistakes. To paraphrase a famous quote by George Santayana, "Those of us who are not aware of the lessons of history are condemned to repeat them."

As we approach the holiday season, we do so in a spirit of gratitude and humility. Angus breeders are experiencing the best of times, and for that we are thankful.

With the birth of the new year, I, along with the staff members of the Association, Angus Productions Inc. (API) and CAB, reconfirm our resolve to present the Angus breed to both producers and consumers in the most favorable light possible. Let us all resolve to challenge the status quo and to explore new worlds. Let us resolve to replace emotion and tradition with science and economics. And let us resolve to objectively pursue a course of action that will enhance our industry and our way of life.

Our best wishes are extended to you and yours for a joyous holiday season and a prosperous 2004.



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