



# Setting the PACE

► by **Susan Rhode**, director of communications and public relations

## It's time to speak up!

*Part of living in the world of agriculture these days means serving as a spokesperson for the industry you love and for the caretakers of the land and livestock that sustain it. Urban populations with virtually no on-farm experience, or even knowledge about where their food comes from, are creeping up on all sides of us, making it increasingly more difficult to spread the word about good things farmers and ranchers do every day.*

### Spokesperson network

The National Cattlemen's Beef Association (NCBA) has founded a new program to help producers stay informed about happenings in the beef industry, know more about where beef checkoff dollars are being spent, and stay current on policy and environmental issues. This program is called the Cattlemen's Spokesperson Network (CSN) ... and it's calling your name.

"We're not trying to educate producers to the Ph.D. level with this network," says Sharyl Sauer, executive director of industry communications for the NCBA. "We just want to give them points that they can use in discussions at the local coffee shop or that help them sort the facts."

The project was made possible through a grant of \$25,000 to the National Cattlemen's Foundation (NCF) from the *Shared Solutions*<sup>SM</sup> agricultural initiative of the Philip Morris Family of Companies. CSN is designed to equip farmers and ranchers with the training and tools they need to be confident and effective spokespersons for the beef industry on environmental issues.

### How does it work?

NCBA works with state organizations to identify beef producers who are willing to participate in a training program, and to commit their time and talent to refute misinformation and to proactively distribute accurate information about environmental and industry issues. Producers will participate in a one-day, intensive spokesperson training session. As a part of the network, they will receive timely information via an e-mail newsletter on issues affecting the industry. Each state will also have a designated CSN coordinator who will work with producers on an ongoing basis, making the most of resources on the local, state and national levels.

A program like this from our national beef industry organization might sound familiar to you. The "Mythbusters" program was initiated by the National Cattlemen's Association (NCA) back in the 1980s and served as the first organized beef industry effort to empower a force of industry representatives to combat the mixed messages that media and other outside influences push on consumers. CSN is an

updated, streamlined version of that type of program, catering to the needs of today's busy farmers and ranchers.

"While research proves that consumers continue to hold a positive image of farmers and ranchers, they still need constant reassurance that producers are acting in a socially responsible manner in regard to the environment," says Don Butler, NCF chairman. "We plan to utilize this grant to help tell our story of being good stewards of the land, water and air."

Now entering its fourth year, the *Shared Solutions* agricultural initiative addresses issues common to agricultural producers and ag-based consumer products companies. Since its inception in 1999, it has awarded more than \$1 million in grants to nonprofit organizations throughout the agricultural chain.

"The entire agriculture production chain is responsible for providing a healthy environment as well as a healthy food supply," says Katherine Trent, director of agricultural relations for Philip Morris Management Corp. "Philip Morris is proud to support the efforts of the National Cattlemen's Foundation to increase understanding of environmental issues and stewardship efforts in the U.S. beef and cattle industries."

If you haven't heard about CSN from your state cattlemen's organization or beef council, give them a call. Many states are already organizing CSN training sessions. If your state is not, take the initiative yourself to help plan it, and start recruiting friends and neighbors to join you in the process.

The more people we educate, the easier it becomes for all of us to be effective spokespersons, allowing us to reach more consumers with our message. We need your help ... and we need it now!

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### The Last WORD

"We all have big changes in our lives that are more or less a second chance."

— Harrison Ford