

Youth education is an important part of the Texas Beef Council's (TBC) mission to inform consumers about the healthy benefits of beef, according to Erin Worrell, the coordinator for youth education programs at the TBC.

Worrell has been in charge of youth programs for the TBC for the past two years. "When I started at the Texas Beef Council the beef industry as a whole was moving toward a more focused message and focused target for the youth program.

"The beef industry has invested a lot of money researching youth audiences and doing focus groups with them," Worrell continues. "The industry chose nutrition to be the message they are going to focus on, instead of covering a wide range of topics and messages for the youth audiences."

The nutrition message the beef industry chose is "Beef gives you ZIP." ZIP stands for zinc, iron and protein — three of the most important nutrients of any diet.

"It has been interesting trying to change existing programs, create new ones with these nutrition messages, and find new venues to deliver the nutrition messages to kids and their parents," Worrell says.

Issues management

When Worrell began at TBC, she was put in charge of carrying out the youth education programs. She was also the industry liaison from the office to groups like Farm Bureau, Extension agents and Texas CattleWomen.

Beef product recalls and *E. coli* outbreaks are examples of issues Worrell is responsible for managing. "We as a state beef council get these messages, and we share them with other organizations on our Beef Issues Team in Texas to make sure we are on the same page, and all communicating the same messages. It is definitely a team effort."

She adds, "It lends credibility to the beef industry when beef industry spokespeople are communicating the same message."

Worrell is also in charge of TBC's Web site and its content. "I coordinate decisions about what promotions we will put on the Web site and what kinds of changes we'll make. It is a consumer-focused Web site — mostly recipes, food-safety information and cooking tips for consumers," she says.

Worrell speaks with consumers on a regular basis when they call the beef council for information. She says

CONTINUED ON PAGE 132

Communicating the Good Message

Working for the Texas Beef Council, Erin Worrell is in a unique position to educate consumers on the benefits of beef.

by Stephanie Veldman



PHOTOS BY STEPHANIE VELDMAN

Leading Ladies



► **Above:** One of the main projects Erin Worrell has been involved with since she started with the Texas Beef Council is educating girls about beef nutrition. "We hope we can create future consumers out of them, as well as influence their current attitude toward beef. Kids are major influencers of family food purchases," she says.

► **Worrell** educates consumers on the benefits of beef through the beef council's Web site. The consumer-focused Web site features mostly recipes, food-safety information and cooking tips for consumers.

Communicating the Good Message CONTINUED FROM PAGE 131

people want information on the environmental effects of raising and grazing cattle, as well as on what impact ranchers have made on conservation and wildlife programs. "We get requests on everything from cooking a prime rib roast and purchasing beef to what kinds of byproducts the beef industry contributes to everyday consumers' lives," she adds.

Beef education

One of the main projects Worrell has been involved with since she started with the TBC is educating girls about beef nutrition. The project is a national checkoff-funded program targeting girls ages 8-12 who participate in Girl Scouts. She is working with Girl Scout councils in Texas to implement a program that focuses on nutrition and physical activity.

"Traditionally the beef industry's education programs have been in the classroom," Worrell says. "In addition to that,

we want to reach kids outside the classroom, yet still be in a controlled audience setting. The industry chose to pursue Girl Scouts because they thought it was a unique way to reach girls with nutrition messages where they were still together in an organized fashion."

Since the message was going to be the nutritious benefits of beef, the message would impact girls more than boys. "At that age (8-12 years), girls and kids in general are forming lifelong eating habits and lifelong physical activity habits. We hope we can create future consumers out of them, as well as influence their current attitudes toward beef. Kids are major influencers of family food purchases," Worrell says.

She says this project has been a challenge because the Girl Scouts are not a group the beef industry has worked with before. "We had to build a relationship before we built a program," she explains.

Betty Ann Redson, associate director of nutrition communications at the National Cattlemen's Beef Association (NCBA), says Worrell was instrumental in involving Girl Scout groups. "She was very effective in her initial testing of groups in Texas, and she has been a pioneer for the program as one of the first to implement it in her state," Redson says. "Texas has had one of the biggest responses out of all the states participating."

"Once the relationship was built and they were in good understanding of who we are and what messages we are trying to get across — well-balanced nutrition and physical activity messages, not trying to exploit Girl Scouts to eat more beef — they were really open to it," Worrell says.

There are about 11 states actively using the new beef nutrition program. Girls can earn a patch after completion of the required activities, which can include but are not limited to compiling a cookbook, logging physical activity and good nutrition activity.

One of the most effective tools has been the *Reader's Theater*, a video that puts the beef nutrition message into a context that children like to watch, Redson says. "It is also easy for teachers or group leaders to use, because even if they don't do anything else with the program, kids will still be getting the message through the video.

"Another favorite event for the girls is the fantasy theater," Redson continues. "They have fun putting on costumes and painting stage settings. They are also encouraged to put on their production in community areas. It also gets the beef nutrition message out to others in the community."

The national Girl Scouts program has about 2.8 million members. "We are only focusing on the junior level of Girl Scout members at this time, and we can hardly keep up with the demand for the program," Worrell says.

Importance of beef councils

Worrell says that the beef councils that producers support through their checkoff dollars are important because the councils' goal is to increase consumer awareness and consumer education in an effort to build consumer demand for beef.

"That returns profitability to the producers. Producers are already investing this money," Worrell says, adding that it is important to have a state beef council effort put dollars toward making an impact on

A dual role

Working in dual roles in the cattle industry can be challenging at times, says Erin Worrell, Austin, Texas. Since she sometimes represents two facets of the industry through her job and her husband's job, Worrell has learned how to see things from different perspectives.

Her husband, Casey, is a regional manager for the American Angus Association and a representative of Angus breeders in his region — Texas and New Mexico. Erin works for the Texas Beef Council (TBC) in the communications department.

"We have some interesting conversations at home because Casey is so Angus-focused, and being with the beef council we have to be nonbreed-specific," Erin says. "Sometimes at home our conversations about the beef industry and work are different because we are coming from two different perspectives."

Casey says that with both of them working in the cattle industry, they can relate to what each other is doing. "We have many common friends and interests, and she is very understanding about my job," he says. Last year Casey estimates he spent more than 100 nights in hotel rooms while he was on the road working.

Erin says that she and Casey met while she was a student at Texas A&M University. Casey was managing a ranch outside of College Station, Texas. They have been married for about two and a half years.

"About a year and a half after we started dating, he left the ranch and started ultrasounding. He had a lot of Angus clients, who led him to the job as the regional manager when the position came open," she says.

Casey says that he knew he wanted to work for a breed association, but it had to be one he believed in.

"I managed a ranch with four registered breeds, including Angus," he says. "After working with Angus there, it was obvious the direction I wanted to go." Casey's working as a regional manager also gave the Worrells the flexibility to move where Erin's job took her.



PHOTO BY JAMES FISHER

▶ With her job with the Texas Beef Council and his job as regional manager for the American Angus Association, Erin and Casey Worrell can each relate to what the other is doing, Casey says.

consumers in their state, in addition to the nationwide effort.

The beef councils also give producers another group they can go to for information. There is a lot of producer education that takes place on the state level. This includes how to produce a better product and how their product fits into the end food product, not just the animal they send off to the next segment of the industry, she adds.

“The Texas Beef Council tries to do everything it can to inform producers,” Worrell says. “In Texas we have a monthly newsletter that we send out with checkoff program updates, and we try to focus that newsletter on programs we are doing in Texas.”

“Programs vary from state beef council to state beef council depending on the population and what venues are available to get the messages out,” she says. “It seems like every day is a different day working in the beef industry, and that makes it fun.”



Growing up in the South

Erin Worrell grew up in southern Louisiana where her father worked as a county Extension agent. She says that because her father was in Extension “much of his time was spent on everyone else’s farms and ranches.” Her family had a small hobby farm with animals they raised for 4-H projects.

“I showed lambs and pigs, and eventually I convinced my dad that I was responsible and old enough to start showing beef projects, so he let me show heifers.”

Worrell says she wasn’t able to participate in the National Junior Angus Association (NJAA) growing up, but she did participate in the 4-H program in Louisiana. “All of those programs have a lot of similarities in the benefits they teach — the responsibilities, leadership roles, and the chance to meet people, travel around and adapt to different situations,” she says.

She adds that now she has seen what benefits the NJAA can provide youth. And with her husband working with them a lot, “It is without a doubt that our kids will be involved in the junior Angus programs. There is no other option for them,” she adds, smiling.

