



For Granted

► by **Eric Grant**, Angus Productions Inc. Creative Media manager

A jump into the future

Montana's Madison Buffalo Jump offers some poignant lessons about the past, present and future of food production. The geographical features of this high, semi-circular cliff once enabled Native Americans — for more than 2,000 years — to lure and then stampede large herds of bison over the edge.

Our next meal

Far below, a frenzied gathering of men, women and children would butcher the bison, tanning the hides, drying the meat and preparing for the onset of winter. No doubt it was a hazardous activity, fraught with danger and death even for the hunters.

No one knows how many bison met their demise here.

When archaeologists began sifting their way through the tons of bones the hunters left behind, they recognized immediately the ancient killing efficiency that this place once offered.

Today, very few of us understand what it means to go three hours without food, let alone three days, so it's difficult for us to grasp the primal motivations that brought people to this place, year after year.

None of us can comprehend the nagging, desperate hunger that must have clung to these people's bellies or the joy they must have felt when they looked up from the valley floor to see fat bison tumbling over the edge.

They knew their bellies would soon be full, and their families would soon be fed and clothed.

In just the last 150 years — a mere slice of time in the history of mankind — people have finally perfected reliable, efficient food production.

A hunting ground

Most of us live within a few miles of a Wal-Mart, perhaps the most efficient food distribution system ever devised. No longer do we scan the horizon for herds of bison, and perhaps our next meal. Instead, we scan the bar codes on vacuum-sealed packages of corn-fed beef and worry whether it's safe to eat.

Every year, on a worldwide basis, standards of living continue to rise. People on a mass scale have lifted off the yoke of hunting and gathering and pulled on the dress slacks of the working middle class.

In just the last two decades, says Lowell Catlett, an economist and futurist with New Mexico State University, nearly 2 billion

people have risen from abject poverty into the middle class. During the next 10 years, another billion will join their ranks.

And once people join the middle class, they do three things: They burn more fuel. They get a pet. And, ironically, they eat more meat.

A double-edge sword

Less than 5% of the world's population lives within our U.S. borders, which means 95% of our potential customers await their first taste of high-quality U.S. beef in places like China, Europe and the Pacific Rim.

One of the idiosyncrasies of the middle class is hypersensitivity. They fuss about the quality and safety of their food. They riot in the streets about perceived threats to their health. But they no longer worry where their next meal is coming from.

Humanity's success — and the future of U.S. beef — is a double-edged sword of unprecedented opportunities and mind-boggling headaches.

The primary preoccupation of people is no longer finding ways to end the pains of hunger; rather, it's devising ways to prevent high-quality food produced on farms and ranches thousands of miles away, processed by large packers by a multinational workforce, transported on large ships across an ocean, then distributed to grocery stores, restaurants and kitchens, from ever entering the food chain.

It's a truly amazing shift in the way we see the world, and our place in it.

On occasion, we must trace our footsteps back to places like the Madison Buffalo Jump to see firsthand how all of this began and to understand how far we still have to go.

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Editor's Note: "For Granted" is a monthly column written for the Angus Journal by Angus Productions Inc. Creative Media Manager Eric Grant. The column focuses on marketing beef, the beef industry and seedstock in particular — aspects of the business that are often taken for granted as day-to-day tasks take center stage.



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