

Women to Women,



Moms to Moms

American National CattleWomen amp up efforts to inform consumers about beef.

by *Kindra Gordon*, field editor



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Sam's Club, Metropolitan Cooking Shows, college campuses for fall football games — these are all places where you'll find a whole lot of hungry consumers. This past year, you could also find volunteer members of the American National CattleWomen Inc. (ANCW) eager to talk about beef at these locations.

With support from beef checkoff funds in 2014, ANCW volunteers were involved with beef promotion events at 202 Sam's Club stores nationwide; at Metropolitan Cooking Shows in Charlotte, N.C., and Orlando, Fla.; and on five college campuses.

The events were deemed a huge success in the modern-day effort to continue connecting consumers with real faces from the beef industry.

"CattleWomen have a long history of battling myths about the beef industry and being 'boots-on-the-ground' promoters of beef recipes and products to consumers. Their efforts are effective because CattleWomen are relatable to other consumers, many of whom are women and moms who are also raising families," points out Sarah Bohnenkamp, former ANCW executive director.

Info increases sales

Desta Crawford, an ANCW member from Hereford, Texas, who serves as Region IV director for the organization, had the opportunity to see firsthand the successful outreach between CattleWomen and consumers. Crawford coordinated ANCW volunteers across the country for the Sam's Club store promotions that were hosted throughout the summer. Some drove as far as 300 miles to be at a store event. She explains that a contractor was hired to cook and serve beef tenderloin and sirloin strip samples in the store while CattleWomen were on hand to talk to consumers about beef — listening to concerns, answering questions and sharing recipes.

"Our CattleWomen volunteers had very positive feedback from consumers. It was evident that people like beef, they just want to get more information about it."

Crawford and Bohnenkamp also report that those face-to-face conversations translated into more beef sales in Sam's Club stores on the weekends when CattleWomen were promoting beef within the stores.

"Receipts showed a 23% increase in beef sales at the Sam's Club stores over the previous year on the same weekends," Crawford reports. She adds that with the increase in beef prices during the past year, that was a significant jump in sales and an indication that sharing information with people about beef can truly help drive sales.

Teaching kitchen skills

ANCW members had another opportunity to meet consumers face-to-face to talk about beef at two Metropolitan Cooking Shows — one in Charlotte, N.C., in September and the other in Orlando, Fla., in October. All total, about 40,000 consumers attended the two events.

Beef was featured in cooking demonstrations on stage, as well as at a beef booth where samples were handed out and quick kitchen skills were taught by ANCW volunteers.

"We showed consumers how to use a meat thermometer and talked about degrees of doneness for cooking beef. We also demonstrated how to cut beef against the grain," Crawford explains. "Both of these skills are important to get the best beef eating experience."

Another skill that consumers were eager to learn was wrapping beef for the freezer.

"Many people were shocked that they

35 Keys to Success

Industry Involvement & Networking

shouldn't just freeze beef in the Styrofoam and plastic wrap. We showed them how to use freezer wrap to ensure they have a high-quality beef product if they decide to freeze it. We also talked about the option to buy larger quantities of beef on sale and then wrap it for the freezer."

Of these efforts, Bohnenkamp adds, "Our goal is to help consumers have these skills so they can be happy with choosing beef, investing in it and having the best eating experience. Consumers also enjoy meeting real beef producers."

In exit surveys asking participants to recall important beef messages learned at the booth, 80% of consumer participants could remember key facts such as how to identify lean beef in the meatcase, how long ground

CONTINUED ON PAGE 84

Additional ANCW beef promotion efforts

Utilizing social media is another important tool the beef checkoff and American National CattleWomen Inc. (ANCW) are tapping to connect with consumers on the topic of beef.

Former ANCW Executive Director Sarah Bohnenkamp explains that "Twitter parties" that share beef information have been popular for several years. More recently, ANCW has added Pinterest and Instagram, which are primarily photo pages, to engage with consumers — especially tech-savvy millennials — on beef.

Examples of popular ANCW Instagram efforts include hosting a "beef selfie contest" in which consumers submit a photo enjoying a beef meal in exchange for being eligible to win beef prizes. A similar contest included submitting a photo of a favorite beef cut at a local grocery store. On Pinterest, beef recipe contests — for slow cookers, lean beef, five ingredients or less, etc. — have been popular.

"We are able to share great beef content, but also bring great content in from real consumers who enjoy beef," Bohnenkamp notes. "The biggest users on social media are females and moms, so we are reaching our target audience."

Bohnenkamp says ANCW, on behalf of the beef checkoff, has also hosted online discussions with mommy bloggers and consumers and participation has been phenomenal.

"The feedback we get is tremendously positive," she adds. "On average, 75% to 80% of participants indicate they feel better about their knowledge of beef."

ANCW has also focused on integrating social-media efforts into the annual Beef Ambassador student competition that is hosted each October. Bohnenkamp explains that face-to-face classroom presentations are still part of the contest requirements, but student contestants are also encouraged to promote beef through social media efforts. Plus, the five students selected to serve on the National Beef Ambassador team are required to blog once a week during their yearlong term.

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Women to Women, Moms to Moms CONTINUED FROM PAGE 83

beef can be frozen, and what temperature to cook ground beef to in order to be safe and savory.

Campus outreach

In 2014, ANCW was also able to reach out to consumers on college campuses by utilizing beef checkoff funds to hold five unique events at the University of Florida, Cornell University, Pennsylvania State University, Ohio State University and North Dakota State University (NDSU).

These universities were chosen from proposals submitted by collegiate organizations, including collegiate CattleWomen groups, Block & Bridle or Saddle & Sirloin clubs, and Alpha Zeta

fraternities. Proposals included a plan and budget for a one-day activity to promote beef on campus. Members of these collegiate organizations then helped coordinate and host the event on their campus. Some state beef council volunteers were also involved in their respective states.

NDSU hosted a tailgate event prior to a football game and had people sample beef cooked to different degrees of doneness to taste the differences and initiate conversations about beef cooking methods for optimal eating experiences. Ohio, Cornell and NDSU also hosted *Iron Chef*-style cooking competitions for different campus organizations to compete in using steak as their main ingredient.

Some of the universities hosted games — from a hay toss to roping — to create awareness and facilitate conversations about what cattle eat and how producers consider animal welfare of their cattle. Another university had students write short comments about why they love beef on a Post-it® note and stick it on the wall — creating a neat visual at the end of the day that showed support for beef.

“These activities were all focused on reaching students face-to-face and engaging in conversations about beef,” Bohnenkamp says.

For other campuses or student organizations interested in hosting similar events in the future, Bohnenkamp says they

would need to fund the effort locally, but with funding from the beef checkoff, ANCW has developed a downloadable “Campus Events Toolkit” to offer best practices and ideas for such events. It is available at www.ancw.org under the Programs tab.

Planning for 2015

Looking ahead, Crawford and Bohnenkamp remain enthusiastic for ANCW’s beef promotion efforts in 2015 — even in spite of budget cuts.

Bohnenkamp explains that beef checkoff funding amounts for 2015 are considerably lower than in years past, but she says, “We plan to apply for several private grants and want to continue to build a strong pipeline

peer to peer, student to student, mom to mom.”

Crawford says that beef checkoff funding for the face-to-face retail promotions on the national level will continue. She says they may look at different retailers so they have data to compare and contrast experiences in reaching different consumers. Additionally, they may start with spring promotions instead of solely focusing on summer.

“We want to be able to show people pan broiling and other options for preparing beef in addition to grilling,” Crawford says.

All total, Bohnenkamp emphasizes that multiple promotion efforts will continue to be important in driving beef demand.

“There’s not a silver bullet — not just one thing will drive beef demand. It takes several things and several organizations working together; CattleWomen are glad to be part of that effort,” she says. “We know we have unique value no one else can bring to the table with regard to educating and informing consumers about beef. CattleWomen are proud to connect with consumers as women to women and moms to moms.”



Editor’s Note: *Kindra Gordon is a cattlemoman and freelance writer from Whitewood, S.D.*