



Angus Stakes

► by Shauna Rose Hermel, editor

Be the authority in advocating for animal welfare

When speaker Bruce Vincent addressed the Ag Media Summit in Minneapolis in 2010, the point that resonated with me was this: The forestry industry didn't start winning battles against environmental activists until they were recognized — and especially by politicians and lawmakers in Washington, D.C. — as the authorities in forest management.

High stakes

The logger from Libby, Mont., and his family could have foretold the problems with fire, wildlife habitat and forest health that have become reality if people would have listened. Instead, environmental activists painted them as killers of the spotted owl and rapers of the forest, and politicians and lawmakers listened. Consumers learned the hard way that unmanaged forests fuel the fires that destroy not only habitat for endangered species, but homes of people, as well. Plus, Vincent pointed out, those fires don't plant trees in their wake like the logging industry did.

His family nearly lost their family-owned business before things turned around — before they figured out that they needed to position themselves as the authorities to solving forestry problems for the good of the consumer rather than argue with the activists on a stage set by the activists.

There's a definite lesson there for the beef industry. We should be the authorities in animal care. But just telling people that we know how best to take care of animals because we grew up in the industry, because we know livestock and because these

practices have been used by our family for generations isn't enough.

Constantly learn

It's time for our industry to set the agenda for what animal welfare is. To do that, you have to know why it is so and you have to be willing to constantly study, learn and share.

I was so impressed with the approach Dan Thomson and the Beef Cattle Institute took with the International Symposium on Beef Cattle Welfare in 2010. In addition to addressing such topics as how to respond to consumer concerns and what activist groups pose threats to our livelihood, symposium speakers addressed animal welfare — how do you measure it, how do you minimize stress at weaning, how do you best manage pain in cattle, what management issues can we address in feeding cattle on concrete under roof, and just what are a caregiver's responsibilities?

How many hours are too many on a truck? How can we make shipping cattle safer? How can we prepare emergency personnel to take the best care of animals involved in an accident?

I encourage you to revisit symposium

coverage at www.api-virtuallibrary.com/meetings_other_news.html. Make it a point to attend this year's symposium June 5-7 in Saskatoon, Saskatchewan. If you can't be there in person, there is a very reasonable registration rate to attend by webcast. Review the agenda and register online at www.beefwelfare2012.ca/index.php/test-conf-reg-form.

Be an advocate for welfare

It's true; it has never been easier and it has never been more important for you to utilize the tools available to advocate for agriculture. As you do, advocate for animal welfare because you are an authority in animal care.

- Share what you know through experience and family history. It is valid.
- Show that you are constantly learning how to better provide for the animals in your care. You're open to new ideas that will improve their welfare.
- Share the experts you call upon to help you take care of your animals. You enlist quite an advisory team — your veterinarian, nutritionist, extension agent, the magazines you read and the meetings you attend.
- Share the emotional attachment you have to your livestock, to your industry and to the consumers your industry supports.

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