

'Beef Counts' Truly

Idaho cattle producers donate nutrient-rich beef to help end hunger, while positively telling their story and inspiring other cattlemen and women to do the same.

by **Kim Holt**

This past spring, the Idaho beef industry celebrated its second anniversary of Beef Counts, its commitment to neighbors helping feed neighbors in need.

The campaign provides an ongoing supply of boxed beef to needy Idahoans, while also communicating the nutritional benefits of beef and helping promote a positive industry message. It brings together Boise-based Agri Beef Co., the Idaho Cattle Association (ICA), Idaho CattleWomen (ICW) and the Idaho Beef Council, in partnership with The Idaho Foodbank.

In Year 1, Beef Counts helped raise awareness. Now, says Jay Theiler, Agri Beef's executive director of marketing, the goal is to continue to grow this program in order to maximize its impact because, he assures, "the need is year-round."

The Idaho Foodbank is able to distribute an average of 5 pounds (lb.) of meat per month per family. But that means each person in a family of four receives only about 0.7 ounces (oz.) of meat per day, not near enough to meet the need for a healthy diet.

USDA guidelines recommend 6 oz. of protein per person per day, and high-quality



PHOTO BY MAGGIE MALSON

► The Beef Counts program provides an opportunity for Idaho and Washington cattlemen and women to help fight hunger within their communities, while also projecting a positive message for the industry. Many producers both donate and assist with distribution, because they want to see their contributions work locally. As pictured here, members of Idaho's beef industry, including Laurie Lickley of Jerome and Wyatt Prescott, Idaho Cattle Association executive vice president, help distribute shoulder clod roasts, complete with beef brochures detailing cook once-eat twice recipes in both English and Spanish.

beef is one of the best sources of complete proteins. However, for families and seniors in need, protein in the form of red meat is often a luxury they can't afford.

"Hunger relief and ongoing efforts and the need for a sustainable, reliable supply of beef have never been greater or more important," relays Jenifer Johnson, vice president of development for The Idaho Foodbank. "As America battles back from this economic recession, we're seeing a new face on hunger — the working poor and those who have never needed to ask for help to feed their families. Their stories and their situations are all too familiar."

She says, "Hunger affects everyone; many

for the first time are accessing food banks. The increase is as high as 30%."

Many Idahoans reaching out for assistance are veterans, she says. One in four Idaho children is in need of hunger relief but is afraid to ask for help, and 8.4% of Idaho seniors — more than 14,000 people — are below the poverty line.

"One of the things we see in the nonprofit food emergency assistance network is a real correlation between malnutrition, obesity and hunger," she adds.

According to Julie Pipal, the Foodbank's food resource manager, Idaho ranching families have donated nearly 200,000 servings of beef to The Idaho Foodbank since the



Makes a Difference

program's inception. Each animal contributed through the Beef Counts program creates about 1,600 servings of high-quality beef.

"The Idaho Foodbank couldn't bring this kind of food into the nonprofit throughout the state without this kind of partnership," Johnson assures.

"Thanks to the power of a united effort to end hunger, The Idaho Foodbank and our partners in communities across the state who are really embedded in this emergency food relief assistance network are seeing victories every day."

The Idaho Foodbank is part of the national food-banking network, Feeding America. It doesn't charge for food or rely on government subsidies, but it annually sorts and distributes more than 8 million lb. of food.

In Idaho, the Foodbank and its partners from more than 220 nonprofit agencies — among them churches, food pantries, shelters and emergency kitchens — struggled to provide a consistent supply of protein for the more than 110,000 Idahoans it feeds each day. That is, until the Beef Counts partnership was formed.

Cattlemen donate cattle, cash

Donations to Beef Counts start with the generosity of cattle producers who turn animals into cash through one of the qualified Beef Counts feedlots or auction markets, or support the campaign through an auction roll-over or cash contribution. Agri Beef matches contributions 50% up to \$50,000, helping stretch each donation even further.

Agri Beef had already been making significant contributions of cash and food products to food banks in both Idaho and Washington for a number of years. However, it was looking for a way to provide greater



amounts of high-quality protein to people in need.

Theiler explains that Agri Beef determined it could make an even greater impact in helping stamp out Idaho hunger if it leveraged the beef industry and got everyone involved.

Beef Counts contributions are counted quarterly. The Foodbank then uses these dollars to purchase beef at wholesale prices from Agri Beef's AB Foods in Toppenish, Wash. This processor cuts the beef into family-sized cuts of beef, such as roasts, which can be spread over multiple meals, and transports the beef free of charge.

The beef packages are stickered by industry volunteers and distributed by the Foodbank. The Idaho beef industry is clearly recognized on each package, accompanied by a brochure detailing proper cooking methods, recipes, nutrition, and safe beef handling and storage information (see photo).

Inspiring others

The response from the state's cattle industry to Beef Counts has been extremely positive, and the program has inspired other states to help their neighbors in need.

In fall 2010, Beef Counts successfully started up in Washington state, and Kentucky will bring on a similar program in September 2012, reports Traci Bracco, Idaho Beef Council executive director. Bracco says she often receives calls from other states looking into Idaho's program.

Wyatt Prescott, executive vice president of the Idaho Cattle Association, says the true compassion that has been exhibited by the industry itself has been "amazing."

"When you think of cowboys and cattlemen, you think of them as rough-tough folks," he says. "It really speaks volumes for how compassionate our industry is, how society-responsible cattlemen are and how much they care about their fellow man."

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Bracco adds, "So often in the beef industry we're in reactive mode when it comes to the media and news stories. This is a way for us to be proactive by helping out our neighbors in need, but also generating positive publicity for what we do every day: put beef on people's dinner tables."

While positive publicity is a plus, Prescott says producers don't contribute to Beef Counts because they want to be a little more accepted within popular society.

"They just care about doing the right thing to help somebody else out," she says.

To this end, it's greatly appreciated. Johnson thanks producers for the commitment they've made to the Beef Counts campaign and for "providing the nutritious beef protein that we did not have up until this partnership existed."

She assures, "You are truly making a difference, and I want to thank you from the bottom of our hearts."

For more information about the Beef Counts programs in Idaho or Washington, see www.beefcounts.org.

▶ Idaho's beef industry is clearly recognized on every package of beef made available through the Beef Counts campaign in that state.

PHOTO BY KIM HOLT

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