

Who Wouldn't Want Sustainable Beef?

Roundtable aims to sort things out, starting with a definition.

by **Miranda Reiman**, *Certified Angus Beef LLC*

Sustainability means different things to different people.

"If we're not sustainable in what we do, we're out of business," said Nebraska cattleman Bill Rishel. "Many of us in the cattle business grew up thinking of sustainability as making enough money to keep ranching the next year. Of course that meant we had to care for our natural resources and manage them in a responsible way.

"That's not as obvious to today's consumer," he said, "so we need to be part of this movement to redefine the concept."

To some, it's about increasing efficiency; to others it centers on land management. The National Cattlemen's Beef Association (NCBA) did an assessment on the topic, and issued a comprehensive report last year.

"We define sustainability as balancing environmental responsibility, economic opportunity and social diligence," said NCBA's Kim Stackhouse-Lawson. "To the producers at home, this is really about continuing to leave ranches from generation to generation, improving their livelihoods, and contributing and providing for local communities."

Still, it's hard to reconcile the way each industry segment defines the buzzword and its perception for consumers.

At the recent Cattle Industry Convention in Nashville, Tenn., a McDonald's Corp. vice president said that's why his company helped start the Global Roundtable for Sustainable Beef (GRSB).

"If we don't invest in sustainability, we're not going to have all the customers we want in the future," Bob Langert said. "We know what we're good at, and we know what we're not good at. What we're good at is running restaurants, but we need to rely upon beef

ranchers, processors, the industry to figure out what sustainability means."

The *Certified Angus Beef*® (CAB®) brand recently took a chair at the GRSB to join in the conversation.

"We believe it's our responsibility to have these discussions on beef sustainability on behalf of our partners and our consumers," said Mark McCully, CAB vice president of production. "We look forward to working with the greater beef community in their efforts to help define this somewhat abstract topic."

CAB will bring a unique perspective as the world's largest producer-owned branded beef program.

"We work in every segment of the beef industry, so we try to look at any challenge through the lens of all of those different players — from rancher, feedlot and packer to processor, distributor and end-user," McCully said.

Langert said he hopes the roundtable can synthesize a common standard from the many perspectives of its members.

"Let's come up with a definition of beef sustainability for all of us that's based on science and is going to help drive our businesses forward," he said.

The GRSB's beef community, environmental and food business leaders share knowledge and resources that support sound, responsible and viable beef production. The group goes beyond reducing costs and maximizing production to focus on the environment, animal care and food quality.

Ruaraidh Petre, executive director of GRSB, welcomed CAB to the group.

"This not-for-profit arm of the American Angus Association understands the value and

importance of sustainability to all segments of the value chain, and through their direct involvement with producers in North America, will serve as an important voice in our ever-growing roundtable," he said. "We look forward to engaging with them in this important work."

While global in nature, the GRSB outlines measurable actions at regional and local levels. Key strategies include providing forums for discussion and problem solving. GRSB is the only global forum dedicated to connecting local, regional and global initiatives.

"Sustainability is a common goal of the beef community," McCully added. "Working together through the GRSB, we can bring all viewpoints to the conversation and help ensure the best possible care of the resources."

An initiative to advance continuous improvement in sustainability of the global beef value chain through leadership, science and multi-stakeholder engagement and collaboration, the GRSB envisions a world in which all aspects of the beef value chain are environmentally sound, socially responsible and economically viable. Its founding members are Cargill, Elanco, JBS, McDonald's, Merck, Solidaridad, Walmart and the World Wildlife Fund. For more information, visit www.grsbeef.org.

For a more in-depth look at the sustainability issue, see the April 2014 *Angus Journal*, which is available online at http://angusjournal.epubxp.com/read/account_titles/174018.

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