

In Search of Food Security

Childhood experience fuels perspective on food and health — for everyone.

by *Kindra Gordon, field editor*

Iwant to grow old. I want to grow old in a healthy way — and I want that for everybody.” Those were among the opening remarks of Sarah Ramirez, who was the guest speaker at the American National CattleWomen’s annual meeting in San Diego, Calif., Jan. 26.

Ramirez grew up in California as the daughter of Mexican farm workers. Her parents were not American citizens at the time and relied on public assistance to raise their family. As a result of her circumstances, Ramirez noted that she and her siblings were at high risk for being high school dropouts and ending up in gangs. Additionally, they experienced food insecurity and — like many other impoverished families — witnessed family and friends become disabled and even die from poor health due to the lack of access to nutritious food.

“We didn’t have access to nutritious food even though my parents were in the fields picking fresh produce every day,” she said.

A watershed moment for Ramirez occurred when her 41-year-old uncle — her dad’s twin brother — died from complications due to diabetes.

“That hit a chord with me. I began to question ‘What are we doing to keep

ourselves healthy?’” she shared with the ANCW audience.

Initially Ramirez was on the path to become a doctor, but, she said, “Then I realized the link to food and health and the opportunity to help more people. I changed my career path.”

Today, she is the executive director for FoodLink, a food pantry in Tulare County California. She notes that this county, which is the county in which she grew up, ranks first in ag production in California, as well as the United States. Despite that, it ranks high for poor health and has several “food deserts,” areas that do not have access to fresh, nutritious food.

“I’m not a traditional food bank director. I’m a teacher, community researcher, advocate and epidemiologist,” Ramirez described of herself. “I love the power of food to unify, especially toward health and culture.”

Additionally, Ramirez and her husband have co-founded BeHealthyTulare, a grassroots collective with a focus on education. She explained, “Our goal is to democratize the food system and address access and affordability; we are building social cohesion with conversation.”

Activities have included educational



programs, cooking workshops, fitness classes, initiating a garden project and implementing a no-waste system that gleans excess produce and disseminates it through FoodLink.

Through her efforts, Ramirez noted, “I’ve been surprised at how little people know about agriculture.”

Ramirez encouraged those involved in addressing hunger in their communities to “incorporate education into your food-drive efforts.” She also encouraged communicating with local food pantries to determine the specific needs, as opposed to just hosting a generic food drive.

For the future, Ramirez has her goals set on a possible mobile food pantry, as well as a mobile nutrition and education unit to address food and nutrition needs in her county. “I want to reach people where they are,” she concluded.

Learn more about Ramirez’s efforts at www.behealthytulare.org.



Editor’s Note: *Kindra Gordon is a cattlemaster and freelance writer from Whitewood, S.D. This article was written as part of Angus Media’s online coverage of the Cattle Industry Convention & NCBA Trade Show. For additional coverage, visit the Newsroom at www.4cattlemen.com.*

CattleWomen go collegiate

Members of the 2016 National Beef Ambassador Program (NBAP) team and members of participating Collegiate CattleWomen’s teams met Tuesday, Jan. 26, at the 2016 Cattle Industry Convention and NCBA Trade Show in San Diego, Calif., as part of the American National CattleWomen’s (ANCW) meetings.

The 2016 Beef Ambassadors included Kalyn McKibben of Oklahoma, Ashtyn Shrewsbury of Nebraska, Mackenzie Kimbro of Arizona, Kylee Sigmon of Arkansas, Lauren Schlothauer of New Mexico and Hannah Nave of Tennessee.

McKibben outlined the current NBAP program.

While there are advantages to the program, like having opportunities to meet and talk with urban consumers in cities like Orlando and Nashville, as well as meeting with industry leaders, she stressed there is room for improvement.

“As millennials, we look for opportunities to set ourselves apart,” McKibben said. “I know there’s a bigger opportunity for us to have more feet on the ground.”

She explained that the NBAP should include more of its members, because in the act of choosing five to participate in the program, the organization loses touch with many of its potential advocates.

“We pick five,” she said. “We need all we can get. It’s what the industry needs, and it’s what we want to provide.”

The agriculture industry is so dynamic and consumer-focused, McKibben said, the organization needs to remember to cover all its bases.

“We all have our own thing,” she said. “It’s about leveraging those passions. We want to make sure we’re equipping our young people

with the opportunities and skills they can use to go talk to anyone about beef and agriculture.”

That includes the entire spectrum, she noted, including farmers and ranchers, corporate companies, consumers and private industry.

McKibben also pointed out the importance of networking to today’s young producers.

“If we don’t switch our focus to equip our young people, we’ll lose our relevance,” she said. “We have to invest in people and invest in our collegiates.”

How does she plan to do that? Provide opportunities for leadership roles.

McKibben and her team proposed a revamp to the program — the ANCW Collegiate Beef Advocacy Program (CBA). The program was created for beef industry advocates who aim to bridge the gap between farm and fork.

The program will aim to connect collegiate leaders to the beef industry, where they will have unlimited access to leadership, peers, cattle industry professionals, farmers and ranchers. Each state president will designate one collegiate candidate and working group chair to represent his or her state.

All candidates will become part of the 2017 team. A points system was outlined to select the top five to serve in the traditional role of the NBAP team.

The program is a step forward, but a work in progress, McKibben said.

For more information on the current NBAP and future CBA plans, visit www.ancw.org, or contact McKibben at 417-529-8973.

— by *Shelby Mettlen, assistant editor*



PHOTO BY KINDRA GORDON

CattleWomen Chart Course

ANCW members continue to strive to engage and educate producers, public.

by *Kindra Gordon*, field editor

The American National CattleWomen (ANCW) convened meetings as a precursor to the 2016 Cattle Industry Convention hosted in San Diego, Calif., Jan 27-29. On Jan. 26, more than 100 CattleWomen from across the country gathered to share ideas and discuss programming for the organization's future.



▶ Retiring ANCW President Melanie Fowle and Gabriella DeSimone shared the lesson plans that CattleWomen can utilize for K-12 Education programs.

During her remarks, ANCW President Melanie Fowle emphasized that ANCW has two focuses going forward.

"We have many issues to address, but our top priorities for the coming year will focus on collegiate and women's leadership," she explained.

Several Collegiate CattleWomen chapters are currently in existence at college campuses across the country, and it's anticipated that about 200 Collegiate CattleWomen would attend the Cattle Industry Convention for the week.

Regarding the organization's focus on women's leadership, Katie Carruth, ANCW executive, expressed, "Thirty percent of U.S. farms are being run by women. We need to meet that need of facilitating leadership for them." She noted that includes programming that aids with tax planning and business management, as well as initiating women's involvement in leadership roles within the industry.

ANCW has begun offering monthly webinars on leadership and business topics to their membership. They also have revamped the e-newsletter that delivers information to the membership.

In efforts to reach a broader audience, ANCW is active with social media. In 2015 the organization hosted five Twitter parties (@BeefPros) to engage consumers with "mommy bloggers" on the topic of beef. A total of 228.2 million impressions resulted from these events.

ANCW member Kasey Wallace reported that survey feedback from participants was very positive regarding their perceptions of beef.

"I know we were able to make a positive influence," she said. Noting that beef-related parties via Instagram and Pinterest were

also hosted, she said, "Twitter has been strongest for us."

ANCW also has a presence on Facebook and SnapChat at NAT_CattleWomen.

Later in the week the ANCW convened its General Membership Business Meeting. One business item considered was a proposed slight name change and a new logo. The ANCW Executive Committee proposed that the word "National" be dropped from the organization's name, to become the American CattleWomen. The name change was not accepted.

Also at the business meeting, Pennsylvania's Ann Nogan took the helm of the organization as president.

The ANCW website provides this definition of its members: An American CattleWoman is a strong, enthusiastic woman, willing to stand up for what she believes in. She is equally at home on a ranch, in a meeting, at a social function or a legislative venue. She is not necessarily a farm or ranch woman, but she is someone who strongly supports the cattle industry and America's agricultural heritage through education and promotion. Learn more at www.ancw.org.



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