

Sustainability for

JBS executive Cameron Bruett clarifies the buzzword as the capacity to endure.

by Jena McReil, digital editor

With a global population predicted to eclipse 9 billion by 2050, there's never been a more urgent need for sustainable food systems.

Cameron Bruett, JBS USA head of corporate affairs and sustainability, explained that production efficiency will be necessary to supply protein for the world's growing middle class. Bruett was a featured speaker Jan. 27 during Cattlemen's College® sponsored by Zoetis, hosted during the 2016 Cattle Industry Convention & NCBA Trade Show in San Diego, Calif.

"It is the greatest challenge of our time. It is our Green Revolution," Bruett said. "It is going to take everyone, no matter what system you are in, to be more efficient and utilize the finite natural resources we've been blessed with in the most responsible manner possible to try and feed all those people."

He described the term sustainability as the capacity to endure, which includes three main areas: environmental, economic and social. For cattlemen, sustainability means proper



► "People have a right to know what they're eating," Cameron Bruett, JBS USA head of corporate affairs and sustainability, said. "We in agriculture have not done a good job of telling our story, communicating with the consumer, and letting them be a part of that process."

Sustainability is a group project

Panelists explore definition of sustainability and what it will take to attain it.

A return on investment (ROI) isn't always easy to report in exact dollars and cents.

That's how it is with sustainability measures, said John Stika, president of Certified Angus Beef LLC, as he addressed

Cattlemen's College® attendees during the 2016 Cattle Industry Convention in San Diego, Calif.

"Premiums and revenue and return on investment show themselves in different

forms," he said. There will likely never be the same economic incentive for sustainability that there is for weight or quality, but it's still a very important topic for the *Certified Angus Beef*® (CAB®) brand.



► From left, John Butler of the Beef Marketing Group moderated the panel consisting of Keith Anderkin, meat buyer for Arby's; John Stika, president of Certified Angus Beef LLC; and Paige Hartley of Darden Restaurants Inc.

the Future

land stewardship and ensuring a profitable operation for the next generation. Although for consumers, defining sustainability has been linked to certain production systems.

Bruett warned against the mind-set that a niche program, such as organic or grass-fed beef, translates into sustainability.

“Sustainability is about outcomes, not processes,” Bruett said.

Cattlemen should keep in mind their own economic footprint in local communities, the way their management practices influence the natural environment, and what they are doing today to build a profitable future for the generations yet to come.

“Don’t fear sustainability. Take it on in a way that’s meaningful for you and your operation,” Bruett said.

Perspective matters

Achieving a sustainable future for the agriculture industry involves a number of perspectives — from the ranch to the feedlot, and the processor to the retailer. Each stop along the way has different business objectives and challenges that influence the

efficiency of food production. Yet, quite possibly the most impactful voice is that of the consumer, Bruett explained.

A consumer’s view of agriculture production can seem more like a Norman Rockwell painting, Bruett described, with an overly romanticized view of farming and ranching. Because of this disconnect, the industry has experienced unmerited consumer criticism of modern production practices. The technology has evolved, but the industry’s message of why it is important has not.

Bruett said that’s why anti-agriculture activists have such a stronghold on consumer perceptions and policy in the United States. One of the greatest challenges facing the industry, he added, is that people who won’t consume a certain product are dictating the production terms, and a passionate vocal minority can generate power against large companies and the public.

“This trend that we see where we vilify our neighbor and say that my product is safer than yours or better for the planet than yours — this is false,” Bruett said. “We need to celebrate the diversity in American agriculture. We’re all going to have to work together.”

Transparency with consumers will be key to overcoming these challenges, Bruett said. They need to be involved in what’s happening on the ranch in a genuine and honest way.

“People have a right to know what they’re eating,” Bruett said. “We in agriculture have not done a good job of telling our story, communicating with the consumer, and letting them be a part of that process.”

In a growing digital world, social media is an excellent way to promote transparency in food production, even starting with individual farmers and ranchers sharing their stories online. Reaching out in local communities and inviting consumers to see a real-life farming operation is also an impactful way to inform and engage the public with agriculture, Bruett said.

While these efforts are focused way beyond the ranch borders, they are central to providing a sustainable future for the agriculture industry. Bruett encouraged the audience to think about how sustainability already plays a role in their cattle operations and how they can better express that positive narrative with those around them. Every conversation along the way could leave a footprint in the future global beef supply.



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“It’s really about demand protection and growth,” he said.

John Butler of Beef Marketing Group moderated the panel that also included Paige Hartley of Darden Restaurants Inc. and Keith Anderkin, meat buyer for Arby’s.

Butler said his partner feedyards take an approach to the topic that can be summed up in a question: “Are we better today than we were yesterday?”

The panel set out to represent the viewpoint of beef end users.

“We have to listen to our guests and respond appropriately,” Hartley said. For them, that is different in each of their seven restaurant concepts — from The Capital Grille to the Olive Garden. “It’s not a one-size-fits-all solution.”

Anderkin also stressed the partnership mentality.

“We need you guys to be successful for us to be successful,” he told the cattlemen. Beef is the biggest item on Arby’s menu, and Anderkin said it “has a great story to tell across the board.”

Even if the beef community feels like it’s already sustainable, stakeholders need to listen to the consumer’s definition.

“If demand goes away for beef, how sustainable are you?” Anderkin asked.



▶ When it comes to sustainability, said CAB President John Stika, “you never really arrive.”

All four companies are members of the Global Roundtable for Sustainable Beef (GRSB), which describes sustainability as, “environmentally sound, socially responsible and economically viable,” Butler said.

This topic can come with tension, but it shouldn’t, Stika said. “This is not a threat. It’s an opportunity.”

One that will continue to grow in importance in the near future. When it

comes to sustainability, Stika said, “you never really arrive.”

— by **Miranda Reiman,**
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Editor’s Note: Miranda Reiman is assistant director of industry information for Certified Angus Beef LLC. This article was written as part of Angus Media’s online coverage of the 2016 Cattle Industry Convention & NCBA Trade Show. For additional coverage, visit the Newsroom at www.4cattlemen.com.