



Consumer Focus

► compiled by **Linda Robbins**, assistant editor

Ag education for children, adults

Most members of the ag industry have heard the statistic over and over again: Less than 2% of the U.S. population is engaged in production agriculture. This number is most often used when discussing how to engage consumers who have no reliable, accurate resource to tell them how food is produced or from where it comes.

Education and togetherness

The Beef Promotion and Operating Committee (the Beef Board) is focusing its educational and promotional initiatives on the millennial generation (those born in the early 1980s through the early 2000s) through digital media. Now between 20 and 34 years old, this generation of consumers is projected to outspend Baby Boomers by 2017.

Many of the millennial generation are parents of children less than 8 years old. They want information on where and how food is produced, and how to shop and cook for themselves and their young children. Millennial adults and their children need to have accurate and reliable ways to discover the source of their food.

One way for the industry to engage adults and children is through books they can read together, and/or books that can be used as part of a school curriculum.

Newest in a series

Written by twins Sheridan and Rianna Chaney and edited by their mother, Rebecca, the fifth book in The Chaney Twins' Ag Series was released in November 2013. This book, *Our Star Goes West*, follows the girls' beloved cow (named Star) from their farm in Maryland to their new home on a 3,500-acre ranch in south-central Nebraska.

"The inspiration for the books came from my Christmas letters to friends and family," Rebecca Chaney says. "I always wrote them from my daughters' perspective, and the year they were 3 years old, a dear friend of mine suggested turning the experiences I described in the letter into a book."

Chaney recalls taking their daughters to the pasture to see a set of newborn twin heifers. It was obvious the mother had abandoned one calf. Chaney and her husband asked the girls if they would like to bottle-feed the calf.

"Of course, they wanted to," Chaney says, "and that was our first book." Though she wrote most of the first three books

incorporating what the girls did and said, in the last two books Sheridan and Rianna have been much more involved in the writing and storytelling.

The latest book introduces new experiences for the girls like branding day, roping, watering cattle being fed on cornstalks, swimming in the huge cattle watering tanks, showing, livestock judging, gathering cattle and how ranchers and cattle help the environment and wildlife.

"When we first did presentations at schools, they would be hiding behind me," Chaney says. "Now they are out in front of me, taking charge and wanting to tell the story themselves."

All five books in the present series are 32 pages and are full of color photographs by professional photographer and the books' co-creator Kelly Hahn Johnson of Sharpsburg, Md. Geared toward preschool and elementary-aged children, the text has been selected by numerous Farm Bureau groups, Ag in the Classroom programs, and county and state cattlemen's organizations across the country as their "Accurate Ag Book."

The books and lesson plans are on the USDA National Resource Directory for Agriculture in the Classroom in addition to

To find the books

Books in the Chaney Twins' Ag series are available individually or as a bundle at www.rebeccalongchaney.com or by calling 308-785-8064. You can contact Rebecca at chaneywalkabout@aol.com or visit her booth at the 2014 Cattle Industry Annual Convention and National Cattlemen's Beef Association (NCBA) Trade Show Feb. 4-7, 2014, in Nashville, Tenn.

The Cow in Patrick O'Shanahan's Kitchen (Little Pickle Press, November 2013) is available at www.amazon.com and www.barnesandnoble.com in hard copy and in Kindle and Nook® editions, and in bookstores nationwide.

the American Farm Bureau Literacy list. Lesson plans are available in free downloadable form at www.pabeef.org.

Targeted ag book

Children's author Diana Prichard in November 2013 released *The Cow in Patrick O'Shanahan's Kitchen*, with illustrations by Heather Devlin Knopf. Prichard presents Patrick O'Shanahan, an ordinary boy who has always known exactly where his food comes from: the grocery store. Always, that is, until a cow, a menagerie of chickens and some peculiar trees appear in his kitchen one Saturday morning, making him question everything he's always known about the ingredients that go into his dad's "World Famous French Toast."

Prichard drew on three decades in a rural farming community, a dozen years as a mother and almost 10 years as a farmer to write the book. She says she wanted to make sure the story was fun and not a lecture, and would be aimed at children from ages 4 to 8. She shares that when she started the book, she had no definite idea what kind of story she would tell, but "Patrick sort of leapt onto the page and took control."

She hopes the book will be a catalyst to family conversations about where food comes from and the farm-to-table concept, diversity in American agriculture and an appreciation for farmers, and how families can navigate the complex food system.

"In addition to teaching about agriculture, I wanted to start a conversation about food and where it comes from that would go beyond the book," Prichard says. "I want kids to develop a closer connection to where their food comes from, a sense that they can reach out and grab it, which is a different experience from the one their parents had."

Prichard owns a small farrow-to-finish hog operation in the heart of Michigan's farm country and works as a freelance agriculture and food writer, photographer and professional speaker. She's been featured in/on CNN, MSNBC's iVillage, *The Huffington Post*, and *From Scratch* magazine, among others.

Prichard says there are curriculum plans and video shorts that will soon be available to enhance the book.

"Watching people who have little or no practical knowledge of agriculture dominate our national discourse on food and farming is extremely frustrating. I want to contribute a positive and informed message for parents and kids," Prichard says. "It's clear we need a more balanced dialogue, and, as our future decision makers, children need to understand the importance of supporting agriculture as much as adults."