



Consumer Focus

► by *Diane Henderson, CBB communications manager*

Listening to millennial consumers

How do we know that millennial consumers have little understanding of beef nutrition but seem to feel as though beef is good, or even necessary, for their children? That they are “interested” in health but are not “fanatics?” That value and convenience are two of the most important attributes they want in beef? That they like to experiment in the kitchen, but want more resources to improve their skills? That cooking at home is a creative event with family? Or that they are cooking at home more this year than last?

It’s all about research — market research. It’s absolutely critical to success in selling beef and beef products to today’s consumers.

Times, they are a’changin’

The “doing-it-like-we’ve-always-done-it” or “we-don’t-like-change” approaches simply won’t do the trick in today’s competitive marketplace. The entire beef chain — from farm to fork — must understand what consumers want from beef that would entice them to increase demand for this industry’s end products.

In short, consumers are in the driver’s seat

when it comes to building demand for our end product, and in today’s marketplace, we cannot just toss our product out there and expect the crowds to swarm. If we don’t deliver exactly what consumers want, they’ll just choose something other than beef for their supper tables.

It makes sense to start by asking them

The most dangerous phrase in the language is “we’ve always done it this way.”

—Rear Admiral (Great Hopper) (1906-1902)

what they want from us, and that’s why we base all of our checkoff decisions on sound market research.

Listen up!

With this in mind, the national checkoff’s Market Research Working Group oversees consumer market research efforts that serve as starting points for virtually all other

checkoff programs and investments. The increased consumer demand for beef that we have been

experiencing industrywide in recent years doesn’t just happen by chance. Of course, there are market fluctuations based on things like supply and Mother Nature’s latest antics that affect demand and are out of the industry’s control, but listening to consumers and giving them what they want has been a

Market research

Who represents the target market for beef promotion, and *whom* do they trust?

What do they care about most when it comes to food and food production, and what are the characteristics of the beef they would serve to their families?

When do they decide to eat beef, and what beef products do they choose most?

Where are they from/demographics?

Where do these consumers go to get information, and *where* do they shop?

Why do they want to eat beef, and *why* do they not eat more beef?

How do they get information about beef, and *how* do they share that information?

These are just a few of the questions that the beef checkoff leaders seek to answer through extensive market-research efforts as they guide the investment of checkoff dollars into promotion and information programs aimed at increasing beef demand.

Knowledge about consumers — beef buyers *and* potential buyers — is critical. After all, consumers are in the driver’s seat when it comes to buying beef — or any other product, for that matter. Until we understand the wants and needs of a target audience, what are the chances of meeting their requirements in the beef and beef products we produce for them? It would be like shooting in the dark and hoping to hit something.

That’s why market research is the foundation of all other programs funded by the beef checkoff. In short, it grounds checkoff planning efforts with knowledge about what drives a beef-purchase

decision at the retail meatcase and in restaurants. It spotlights beef’s strengths and weaknesses. It helps planners set consumer goals and track progress toward those goals, then share that information with chefs, retailers, restaurants, nutritionists, dietitians, doctors, foodies and other influencers. It also helps target checkoff investments in the most efficient and effective ways possible.

So what are the answers to the above questions? Here are the short answers, according to the extensive collection of checkoff-funded market research.

The target market for beef promotion and education is the millennial generation — those born between 1980 and 2000. They trust what they can see, but also the advice of foodies and health professionals. They also want to dig online and

find out what their friends and other sources tell them. They love great food, since they grew up in the era of food shows on TV, and beef is included in their definition of “craveable,” wonderful food. They want hints, tips, knowledge about choosing a great steak — anything that can help them maximize their enjoyment of beef.

They care about where their food comes from and how it serves their families’ needs. They want their beef to be safe, nutritious, flavorful, tender, convenient, easy to prepare, and raised with care for the animals and environment. They want lots of choices and information that will set a good example for their children.

When millennials want to “celebrate” by getting out to the grill, they choose beef more often than any other protein. On an everyday basis, however, they make decisions at 4 p.m. or later about what to fix for supper, and they often make decisions while in the grocery



key element of that demand growth.

During the last couple of years, the checkoff's market research efforts have included use of a cost-effective and adaptable tool — a Millennial Listening Panel — to understand our target market of 80 million millennials. This monthly panel made up of millennial consumers from coast to coast provides us with insight about a range of checkoff programs and improves our understanding about current millennial perceptions and the potential impact of programs we can have on that.

The types of platforms we use to interview consumers on these panels are as varied as the questions we ask. For example, one month, we might ask about nutrition via an online survey; the next month, we might have the panel review a new video about cattle production to see if it improves their perceptions about the industry; panel members can post pictures of their favorite meals and describe what makes them so great; and other times, they might be asked to



evaluate potential beef messages, fill out traditional questionnaires, or participate in Skype interviews, online focus groups, or one-on-one interviews.

You get the picture.

Identifying opportunities; acting on them

The upshot is that this ongoing research keeps us up-to-date with consumer trends and perceptions. The responses help us identify consumers' top barriers and motivators for choosing beef, and, ultimately, give us a picture of the most compelling opportunities for helping to grow beef demand through investment of our checkoff dollars so that every checkoff dollar is leveraged to the most effective and efficient degree possible.

Imagine millennial consumers at 4:30 p.m., driving home and stressing, yet again, about what to feed their families for dinner. They want a dinner that everyone will like; something that is tasty and nutritious. Because our Millennial Listening Panel tells us that this is an ongoing dilemma with busy consumers — especially millennial parents with young families — the checkoff continues to create new recipe concepts that will help these millennial parents increase beef consumption for themselves and their children and families.



The four latest concepts were tested among millennial parents, and the winning concepts will be used to create checkoff content online and in social channels (through articles, recipes, etc.). Of these new concepts, “hiding veggies” in an everyday meal captured the most attention and excitement from the target group of millennial parents, intriguing them with its healthiness and the somewhat covert solution it provides them. Watch *Pizza with Purpose*, a short checkoff video that demonstrates this concept on YouTube, and see additional videos at *Bowls with Balance* and *Three Takes on Slow-Cooked Beef* at www.mybeefcheckoff.org.

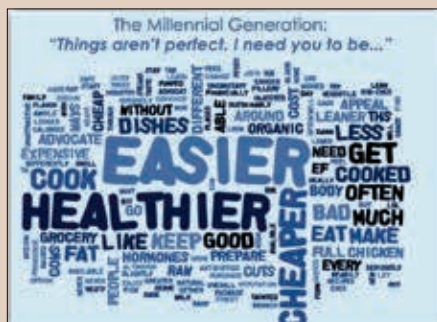


Editor's Note: This article was provided by the Beef Board on behalf of the beef checkoff.

store. They choose ground beef for family meals most often, but want information to expand their choices to new and different cuts and uses.

Millennials are 80 million strong; more racially diverse; finding their niche in the world; asking more questions about their food; and increasing their food spending. They get their information overwhelmingly through social media, including food bloggers, dietitians, “foodies” and other influencers. About 83% of them sleep with their cell phone right next to their beds. They shop at various retail stores, but they love Trader Joe's, Costco, farmers' markets and food trucks. By 2020, total spending power of older millennial parents will hit \$1.4 trillion a year.

Beef's great taste is the No. 1 reason that millennials and other consumers eat beef, and the most limiting factors to increased beef consumption are “health reasons,” “limiting cholesterol or fat,” and “other meats seem healthier.” About 45% say they are extremely or very likely to add one more beef meal per week once



they discover that beef is nutrient-rich, that many lean cuts are available, and that lean beef compares favorably to chicken.

Millennials overwhelmingly get their information about beef and beef production through online

and social-media channels. More than 90% of Americans eat beef at least monthly, and 35% have more than three servings of beef per week, with similar numbers for millennials.

These obviously are highly simplified answers, but every one of them is important to the beef community's ability to change negative perceptions about beef — as defined through another comprehensive area of market research: consumer perceptions. A deep understanding of consumers is an absolute necessity for developing checkoff programs that drive that change.

In short, market research not only puts all of the puzzle pieces on the table, it also helps checkoff leaders put them together for a clear picture of today's marketplace. Learn more about these and other research programs funded through your checkoff program at Beef Research on www.mybeefcheckoff.com.

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