

2011 BLI Participants Gain Industry Knowledge

Eighteen young cattlemen complete Masters of Beef Advocacy program.

Story & photos by **Katie Gazda**, editorial intern

When the hypothetical tassels were turned following the completion of this year's Beef Leaders Institute (BLI) program, the freshly educated Class of 2011 departed American Angus Association headquarters with additional honors.

While participants in the program, which took place June 20-23, were still cultured on the traditional aspects of the program – those that target the development of a cattleman's knowledge of the production process from feedlot to table – they also received schooling on a subject that is becoming increasingly more prevalent in today's consumer-wary society: beef advocacy.

After receiving an acceptance letter welcoming them into the BLI, participants were encouraged to enroll in the Masters of Beef Advocacy (MBA) program. The MBA program, funded by the beef checkoff, was founded with a simple mission: to equip beef producers across the country with the knowledge necessary to tell their story through presentations to schools, church and civic groups, local media and the Internet.

"I didn't know about the program before I signed up for BLI; it opened my eyes to the big picture instead of my everyday life," explained J.R. Lund, BLI participant, MBA graduate and rancher from Montana. "Going through the programs and printing out all of the information gives me a resource to show



► J.R. Lund (green shirt), Montana, plans to incorporate resources from the MBA program into his operation.

my customers and discuss the beef industry in a broader sense."

Interested students are able to apply for acceptance into the MBA program online. After they have been accepted, they create an account that grants them access to all of the benefits of the MBA program, along with their curriculum. The program includes six parts, each providing students with easy-to-understand information on various facets of the beef industry that can be easily conveyed to consumers, animal rights activists or the general public.

The six courses include Modern Beef Production, Animal Care, Beef Safety, Nutrition, Environmental Stewardship and Beef Checkoff. They are presented as interactive slide shows that can be viewed via a student's account, and include text, photos and a voiceover, detailing each course in a timely yet effective fashion.

The last few slides of each course contain homework assignments, essay questions and quizzes. Once students reach this portion of the course, they are no longer allowed to refer back to the previous slides. The evaluations truly reflect the student's knowledge of the topic and ability to convey the information learned.

Interactive

Aside from encouraging participants to enroll in and complete the MBA program, the American Angus Association took the lesson a step further by inviting Daren Williams, the "dean of students" of the MBA program, to visit with the group, follow up on their completion of the program and instill in them the final tools necessary to advocate for the beef industry.

"When you have animals, taking care of them is an obligation – not an option," Williams began. He reminded the group that the meat that we as farmers and ranchers produce might be eaten by our own kids. Therefore, it has to be safe for our kids.



► Daren Williams of NCBA serves as the dean of students of the MBA program and answered questions from BLI participants.



► Jason Pratt (second from left, yellow shirt, white hat), Virginia, plans to clear up consumer misconceptions with the knowledge he gained from the MBA program.

Oftentimes, consumers tend to forget that they are not the only ones purchasing and eating meats. Farmers and ranchers are also aiming to provide food for their own friends and family, and they, too, want what goes into their bodies to be safe.

Williams explained that it is vital for those in the beef industry to relay to the consumer the “2 C’s” – we Care, and we’re Capable. We care about the safety of beef because we eat it, too. We’re capable of producing a safe, wholesome and nutritious product because we invest \$1 million a year in beef safety research.

Williams defended the health benefits of eating beef, explaining that one 3-oz. serving of beef equates to 150-180 calories and provides half of the protein needed in a day. Peanut butter, on the other hand, requires 600 calories to present the same amount of protein.

“Beef is the highest-quality protein you can put in your body,” he deduced.

Despite the varying concerns the general public has raised in regard to the beef industry, whether it be animal welfare, food safety or environment, Williams says he remains solid in his belief that we must always put the consumer first, and be ready to educate the general public whenever the opportunity arises. That in itself is the basis of the MBA program.

“It’s important to acknowledge the consumer’s concerns,” he said. “Consumer concerns are our concerns, too.”

Prepared

The 2011 Beef Leaders Institute helped prepare participants for success within and outside of the industry. From learning the intricate details of one of the largest beef packing plants in the country to gaining the

skills and knowledge needed to positively portray the beef industry to the public, BLI participants were equipped to address questions or concerns that may come their way.

“I learned to be a spokesperson for the industry,” said Dustin Hurlbut, who represented South Dakota at BLI. “I gained the resources that will help me stand up for the beef industry and let consumers know that the things we do are safe.”

Hurlbut, along with the remaining 18 young cattlemen who participated in the 2011 BLI program, join nearly 2,000 MBA graduates from coast-to-coast in their quest to advocate for the beef industry. Graduates of the program range from industry personnel from Kansas to doctors, lawyers and healthcare professionals from New York City.

“Some people have misconceptions,” said Jason Pratt of Atkins, Va. “By completing the MBA program I have more knowledge. I can educate those folks and correct the misconceptions out there.”

The 2011 BLI took place June 20-23 at American Angus Association headquarters in Saint Joseph, Mo., and at various industry stops throughout western Iowa and eastern Nebraska. For more information on the BLI program, contact Shelia Stannard at stannard@angus.org or 816-383-5152.

The Masters of Beef Advocacy program is funded by The Beef Checkoff through the National Cattlemen’s Beef Association (NCBA). For more information on the MBA program, contact Daren Williams, dean of students at NCBA, at 303-694-0305; or visit www.beef.org/mastersofbeefadvocacy.aspx.

