

Marketing To Millennials

This generation is shaping future food trends and marketing efforts.
Here's what the beef industry needs to know.

by *Kindra Gordon, field editor*

If you know someone from the millennial generation — anyone born between the early 1980s to the early 2000s — you're keenly aware that they are devoted to their digital devices. They represent the first generation born with the Internet, and most millennials do not recall a time without cell phones and reality TV.

Because there are now nearly 80 million millennials in the United States, which is 25% of the population and includes about 3 million more people than the Baby Boomer generation, millennials have become the target audience for many industries and brands, including beef.

Beef industry projections predict millennials will represent one of the largest consumer-spending segments in the next five

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years. Almost 70% of millennials say they go to the Internet first when they need information about anything, particularly food — including things related to beef.

As a result, in 2014 the beef checkoff's promotion and information efforts have been shifted from an extensive print and radio consumer marketing campaign to an integrated digital campaign. Promotions are taking on a variety of digital forms, including search engine optimization (SEO), Facebook



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advertising, display advertising and other emerging online tools.

The beef checkoff is working to create online interactions and engagement with the millennial consumer target — driving them to the checkoff's existing resources, like the "Beef. It's What's for Dinner" website, Facebook, Twitter, YouTube and Pinterest properties to access the specific information they need at the exact moment that they need the information.

As of mid-May, the "Beef. It's What's

For Dinner" Facebook page had more than 824,000 followers and the @Beef Twitter page surpassed 9,000 followers. Recipes remain the offering that consumers engage with and share the most.

Because the first place millennial consumers look when searching for information about beef is Google, the beef checkoff increased its search-engine advertising with the site in May. This means consumers who type in queries or keywords such as "how to grill," "beef recipes," "easy family meals" and "party appetizers" will find the checkoff's flagship consumer website, www.BeefItsWhatsForDinner.com, toward the top of the list of matching links.

Meet the millennials

So, are millennials really that different from other generations? A contractor to the beef checkoff, the National Cattlemen's Beef Association (NCBA) conducted a study in late 2013 to answer that question.

Researchers conducted internal interviews with NCBA staff members, along with four focus groups among mature millennials (ages 25-34 years) to learn more about what really defines these consumers. Additionally, they conducted 1,250 online surveys to gain a perspective on the millennial generation vs. non-millennials.

Wendy Neuman, director of market research with NCBA, explains that the purpose of the study was to identify the most promising target segments for beef in terms

Food trends being driven by millennials

What exactly are millennial consumers looking for when it comes to food? During the Animal Agriculture Alliance Stakeholder Summit May 8-9 outside Washington, D.C., Nancy Kruse, a menu analyst in the restaurant industry, shared five food trends being driven by millennials. Kruse said she believes the meat industry is poised to benefit from these trends.

Topping the list is the "**protein power**" trend. Kruse says product claims touting protein content have increased by 54% in the last five years, with Greek yogurt and protein bars becoming popular. Kruse says there is also opportunity here for animal-based proteins.

Along with that, "**snackification**" is a growing millennial trend, meaning snacking is more common than eating distinct meals. Kruse suggests that to appeal to the millennial consumer, meat producers must rethink their center-of-the-plate mentality.

The third trend is "**food activism**," including issues such as antibiotic- and hormone-free and animal-husbandry practices such as cage-free, free-range and gestation-stall-free. To engage this

trend, Kruse said meat producers must "get into the conversation" and enlist appropriate advocates and spokespeople outside their immediate industry.

"**Veggie chic**" is another up-and-coming trend, according to Kruse. This does not mean increased vegetarianism. Instead, it is entrées that include vegetables, which signals an opportunity for meat producers to offer creative menu items that include protein and vegetables.

Lastly, Kruse says "**real foods**" is also a real trend, meaning microwave cooking is being replaced by cooking real food in slow cookers, ovens and by grilling.

Restaurants are also recognizing the preferences of millennials for higher-quality ingredients, better-value food, entertaining casual restaurants and a preference for digital engagement. A recent *Forbes* article on millennials' purchasing behavior noted, "It will be critical for restaurant chains to assess their competitive position and adapt to these new realities."

of millennials' attitudes, values, lifestyles and motivations relative to their perceptions of beef.

Among the similarities the study found between millennials and non-millennials is that both eat beef a couple times a week, and their reasons for choosing beef are also the same. Regardless of generation, most want a great-tasting meal, value for the money and a food they feel confident preparing.

Neuman adds that this also does not change much when preparing meals for children in the household. Consumers still look for a meal the whole family will enjoy that is nutritious and that is reasonably priced.

The study also revealed that both groups of consumers recognize beef nutrients such as protein and iron; however, B vitamins and zinc are nutrients less associated with beef.

Clear differences

While there are similarities across generations, there are also a number of clear differences. For example, Neuman says the study found millennials are more likely to be influencers and want to share their beef-eating experiences with others. Additionally, this group of consumers is eager to learn how to cook better and is very engaged with food.

Neuman says another important insight

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from the study is that when millennials are disappointed with a meal outcome, they are much less likely to try this meal again, which obviously affects their beef-eating experience and frequency of trying new beef recipes.

With regard to cooking, although both millennials and non-millennials indicated that their parents were influential in teaching them to cook, millennials said they tend to use websites and cooking shows to learn to cook.

“We know from this and other research that this generation is much more tech-savvy and are more inclined to use technology to seek and find information,” Neuman says.

Some additional information garnered from the study includes these points:

- ▶ Millennials are not moving away from beef (nor are non-millennials);

- ▶ Mass merchandisers such as Target or Walmart are the primary places to purchase beef for millennials vs. conventional grocery stores for non-millennials;
- ▶ Non-millennials are also more likely to be looking for a specific cut of beef when purchasing compared to millennials. Millennials cook much more with ground beef than cuts of beef;
- ▶ Millennials are much more likely than non-millennials to want to share their food pictures online, and get recipe ideas digitally from websites, Pinterest, Facebook and blogs.

Neuman notes, “This study concludes that there are differences between millennial and non-millennial consumers; however, like all generations there are also similarities. One important aspect is the fact that millennials will be the key beef-consuming segment for decades to come, and we cannot afford to have their interest in beef wane.”



Editor's Note: Kindra Gordon is a freelancer and cattlewoman from Whitewood, S.D.