

Accentuating The Positive

Billboards, TV ads and radio spots are helping broadcast a positive image for the beef industry.

by Kindra Gordon

If you find yourself watching TV in Montana, you may be surprised to see a 30- or 60-second spot showcasing tranquil scenes of rangelands, cattle grazing and wildlife with a brief message reminding the public that Montana ranchers are stewards of this beautiful scenery.

Likewise, in California you might see a billboard broadcasting a similar message — “Wide Open Spaces: Courtesy of Your Local Cattlemen.”

Creators of these unique marketing efforts say they are meant to be a reminder to the general public that the open spaces and scenic lands they drive by and enjoy every day are being taken care of by farmers and ranchers.

In Montana, the TV ads and similar radio spots were placed by the Montana Grazing Lands Conservation Initiative (GLCI). Russell Nemetz is the Montana GLCI chairman. He is also a cattle producer and the ag director for Northern Ag Network broadcasting.

“Through these radio and television messages,” Nemetz says, “we’re trying to convey these beautiful ranges throughout states like Montana and wherever, and that the whole reason you have green grass and clean water is because ranchers take great pride in being the best stewards of the land that they can.”

Nemetz adds, “Our objective is to continue the education process of the general public about conservation practices that are environmentally sound and innovative and to continue to increase the awareness of the importance of grazing lands, one of Montana’s largest natural resources. . . . We’re trying to keep the good word out there about what farmers and ranchers are doing on the ground, every single day, all year long.”

In California, the Butte County Cattlemen’s and CattleWomen’s associations placed their two billboards on beautiful ranches adjacent to a heavily traveled interstate leading into Chico, Calif., where nearly 15,000 students from Los Angeles and San Diego attend Chico State University (CSU).

David Daley, California State University-Chico associate dean of agriculture and past president of the Butte County Cattlemen’s

Association, says the message they want the billboards to convey to urban voters is that the surrounding environment is cared for and sustained by local ranchers — instead of being paved and developed.

Daley says the region’s rangeland and open space is continually threatened by development, and that the public is often misinformed about the critical role rangelands have, not only for cattle grazing, but for maintaining plant and animal biodiversity, as well as recharging the aquifer, and providing wildlife habitat. The local cattlemen and cattlemen felt billboards might help earn some public support for the untamed scenery and open space that come along with ranchland.

More promotion needed

Both Daley and Nemetz say they hope

Educating producers, too

In Montana, Russell Nemetz says their efforts to educate the public about stewardship efforts by farmers and ranchers has helped create awareness among the ag community. Nemetz says the radio and TV ads have helped put the Montana GLCI front and center in the ag community as a resource for helping producers become better stewards through conservation project advice and funding.

He says Montana GLCI is getting a great response to the program, both from ranchers and those outside the industry.

“People are understanding what we [GLCI] do; they’re starting to understand our relationship with the Natural Resource Conservation Service and Extension and industry,” he reports.



other agricultural groups will follow suit in helping broadcast positive agricultural messages through radio, TV, billboards and other media formats. “This serves as a great template for other state organizations,” Nemetz says.

They acknowledge cost is a factor, but not an insurmountable one. Nemetz reports that initially Montana’s radio and TV spots were aired as public service announcements, which are free. Since then ad spaces have been purchased.

Daley reports that the two billboards cost about \$3,500 and sit on land owned by cattlemen’s association members. Funding came from the Cattlemen’s and CattleWomen’s associations and private donations.

For other livestock groups considering a billboard, Daley suggests careful planning.

“If you are in a very rural county with limited traffic and no major highways, you might be better off giving your resources to a billboard that will get more visibility,” he says.

It’s also wise to test your message with someone besides your membership and see if it resonates. “Choose your landscape, your message and your design very carefully,” Daley suggests. Then ask some non-ag folks for feedback before you finalize your message.

And, consider other formats to help convey your message. In California, bumper stickers with the same design and message were created and are very popular. The Montana GLCI has also gotten creative with their campaign, creating pens, notepads, bumper stickers, chocolates, even chapstick, with the GLCI logo and their tagline, “Cowboy up with Conservation: It Can Save Your Grass,” to spread the word that ranchers are concerned about rangeland conservation.

Nemetz adds that other producer groups looking to develop their own marketing and public relations initiatives should feel welcome to contact Montana GLCI to share ideas and learn from their experiences (www.mt.nrcs.usda.gov/technical/glci/).

“We’re not experts, by any means, on any of this,” he says. “You just have to get creative.”

