

Why Does Consumer Opinion Trump Science?

Livestock producers need to reconnect with consumers to learn what drives them.

by **Kindra Gordon**, field editor



PHOTO BY LEANN SCHLEICHER, ANGUS MEDIA

▶ Ronnie Green, who serves as vice chancellor for the IANR at UNL, said the language used by consumers today is representative of society being influenced by opinion rather than science, which was the primary influencer in the past.

‘We have a culture shift occurring,” Ronnie Green stated during his remarks designed to provide insight about consumers to attendees at the kick-off of the 24th Range Beef Cow Symposium in November. Due to a flight delay caused by bad weather, Green, who serves as vice chancellor for the Institute of Agriculture and Natural Resources (IANR) at the University of Nebraska (UNL), addressed the audience via telephone.

Green pointed out that one of the observations he has made among society and consumers is a change in language. He related that 20 to 25 years ago, most consumers’ comments were framed by statements like “I know ...” or “The facts clearly prove ...” However, today the basis for many consumers’ comments are framed by statements like “I believe ...” and “In my opinion ...”

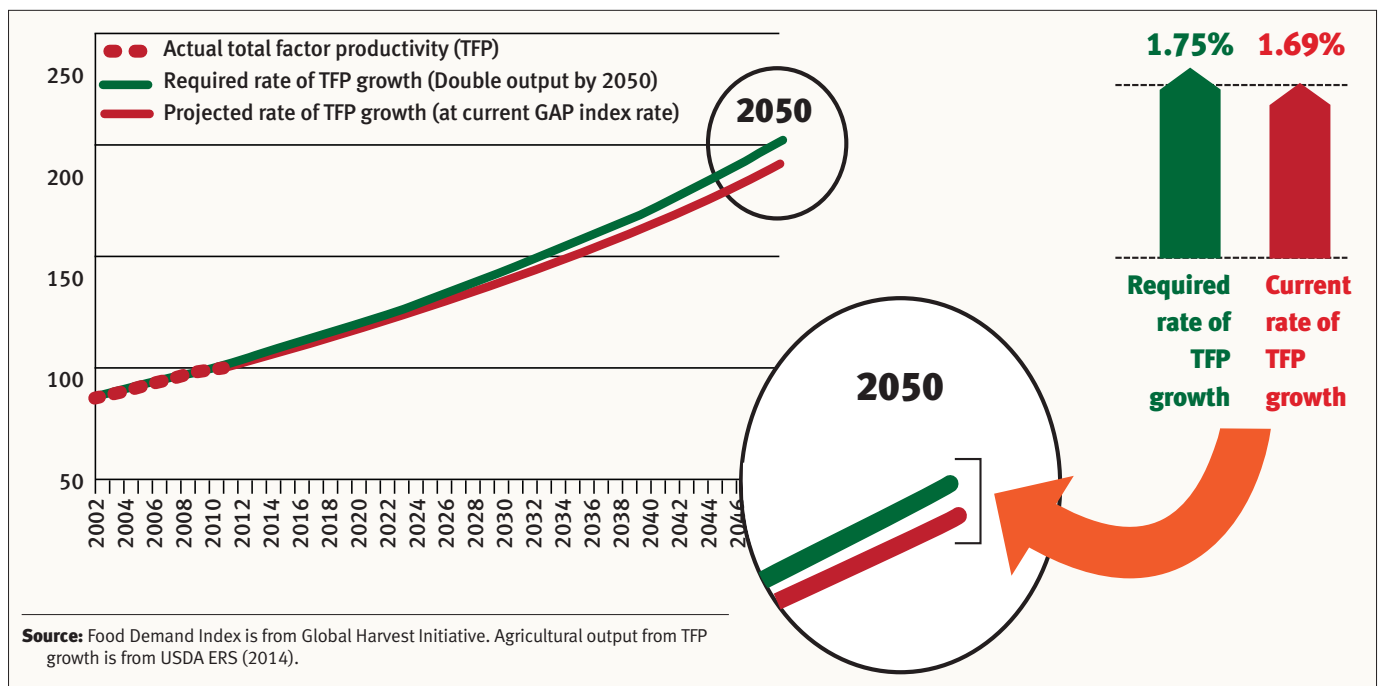
As part of the *Angus Journal’s* full meeting coverage, you can listen to Ronnie Green’s presentation at <http://bit.ly/1VotnrB>.

Green said this is representative of the move from today’s society being influenced by opinion rather than science, which was the primary influencer in the past.

“This is the root of the issue we are dealing with,” he said. “There is a big difference between ‘I know’ and ‘I believe.’”

Along with this, Green said there is a

Fig. 1: The Global Agricultural Productivity (GAP) Index™



Source: Food Demand Index is from Global Harvest Initiative. Agricultural output from TFP growth is from USDA ERS (2014).



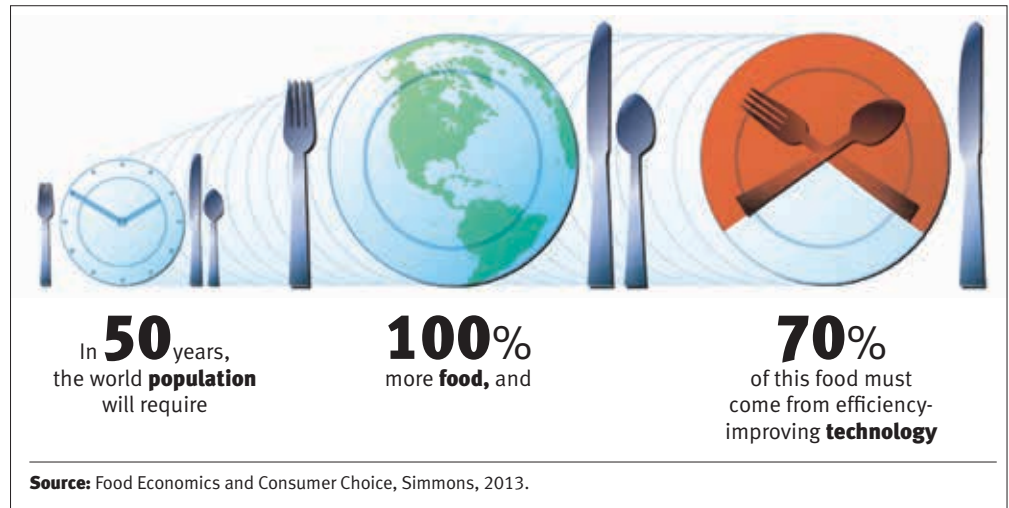
fiercely held anti-belief system among today's consumers against big, corporate, industrial and capitalistic.

Likewise, many people today have a selective belief in science, Green said. "Many consumers choose to believe in science that supports issues that match their agenda, but choose not to believe in science that supports issues they are opposed to." For example, Green said some individuals may support climate change science, but they do not support biotechnology science.

Looking forward, Green said he is concerned that the beef industry will increasingly be misunderstood and misrepresented, specifically related to environmental issues such as water and carbon emissions.

"We need to understand the societal forces around us very well," he concluded. "We need to reconnect what livestock producers do with consumers. Future media campaigns must focus on your stewardship. That's who you are, but the public doesn't understand

Fig. 1: Technological need to meet food demand



that. We need to get ourselves [the beef industry] ahead of that in the future."



Editor's Note: This summary is part of the Angus Journal's online coverage of the 2015 Range Beef Cow Symposium, which was hosted Nov. 17-19, 2015, in Loveland, Colo. For additional coverage,

to review this presentation's PowerPoint or to listen to the presentation, visit the Newsroom at www.rangebeefcow.com. The Angus Journal's coverage of the event is made possible through collaboration with the event committee and sponsorship of LiveAuctions.tv. Kindra Gordon is a cattlegirl and freelance writer from Whitewood, S.D.