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# Growing Strong

Missouri brings beef up close and personal.

Story & photos by **Barb Baylor Anderson**, field editor

**H**ave you ever looked at the four compartments of a ruminant's stomach from the inside? That is one of the interesting things visitors to the Saint Louis Science Center's new agriculture exhibit, GROW, can do. The exhibit opened earlier this summer. It is the first of its kind in the United States to focus solely on agriculture, and will share ag's story with more than 1 million visitors per year.

The Missouri Beef Industry Council (MBIC) helped define the beef elements of the exhibit. The goal was to create a pasture-to-plate experience, promoting science-based beef facts to consumers.

"This type of opportunity does not come along very often," says Glen Cope, Aurora, Mo., beef producer and MBIC director. "We were excited to help because we will reach a lot of influencers, such as teachers, and provide an accurate look at how beef is raised and at the producers who raise it. We want consumers to know that beef is nutritious, as well as address animal care and misconceptions about hormones, implants and antibiotics."

Christian Greer, chief education and programs officer for the Saint Louis Science Center, welcomed the assistance from Missouri beef producers.

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► "We worked with scientists, engineers and university specialists in creating GROW, but the farm expertise came from groups like the Missouri Beef Industry Council," says Christian Greer, chief education and programs officer for the Saint Louis Science Center, who describes GROW as the new jewel in the Science Center's crown.

the farm expertise came from groups like the Missouri Beef Industry Council. They provided information we did not have," says Greer.

Greer describes GROW as the new jewel in the Science Center's crown. The \$7 million exhibit was funded by private donors like

MBIC with support from the National Science Foundation.

## A lot to see

"This is our largest expansion since 1991," he says. "We are in the middle of farm

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country, and wanted to put science in a form that is immersive and interactive. We share from a farmer's perspective [what] most people haven't seen — how this region helps feed the world."

The GROW exhibit is about an acre in size, and has both indoor and outdoor areas for year-round education. In the winter, visitors and school groups will be invited to the greenhouse, where they will have scientific studies under way. A classroom has space for talking about the seasons and cycles of agriculture. During the spring, summer and fall, various crop and animal displays can be explored, along with portable demonstration stations and farm equipment.

The outdoor beef corral is a platform for discussions and learning activities about ruminant digestion.

"The Science Center staff were open-minded, and wanted us to have input into the display. They sought our input on information consumers want," says Cope. "We have beef producers in the area that will bring in a gentle steer or heifer and visit with consumers."

Inside the pavilion, a large, flat wooden map of Missouri invites visitors to virtually bid on cattle at a sale and help move cattle into a pen. Virtual-reality viewers allow people to watch animals feed from the trough's perspective. Visitors to the exhibit can tap on any county of Illinois or Missouri on the interactive wall video maps and hear a farmer in that county discuss their family operation.

"We visited more than 100 farms in Illinois and Missouri with help from Farm Bureau to be able to put these videos together and share another farming perspective," says Greer.

A feed trough in the display invites questions about how animals are fed. Greer says Science Center staff members are prepared to talk about free-range, organic and GMO production, as well as the nutrients animal feed provides and how that compares with human nutrition.

### Still room to grow

GROW also features a shipping container transformed into a Fermentation Station for refreshments, with plans to expand into transportation, infrastructure, utility and water-use issues.

"Our mission is to ignite and sustain technology and learning," says Greer. "The most important thing we can do is to tell the story correctly about how the food we consume is produced."

Cope encourages beef producers in other states to be open to similar opportunities.



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"My advice is to get involved from the beginning and be sure any display is science-based," he says. "We liked that the Science Center wanted to focus on truths based in facts and not in emotions. This is a positive way to reach out to the public,

and they are the ones ultimately buying our product."

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**Editor's Note:** A former National Junior Angus Board member, Barb Baylor Anderson is a freelancer from Edwardsville, Ill.

## Beyond beef

GROW provides visitors with a deeper understanding of where food comes from, the role everyone plays in food-supply stewardship, the science behind agriculture, and the dedication of farmers and ranchers to providing high-quality, nutritious, delicious and reliable food. The exhibit features daily demonstrations, hands-on activities, classes and workshops, guided tours through the plantings and orchard, evening and weekend programs for adults and families, beer and wine tastings, a mini tractor track, and the following:

**GROW Pavilion** indoor space features exhibits, educational programs and planned events that explore farming and its role in today's complex local and global economies. Visitors can browse the seed library, visit the hive and learn how food goes from farm to table.

**Bi-state Agriculture Map** explores agriculture in the region, as visitors dig into the products and processes of Missouri and Illinois that contribute to the global agriculture story.

**Water Works** guides water through channels and pathways to demonstrate how water is a valuable, limited resource that must be used and managed responsibly.

**Botany Basics** provides inner workings of plants and how they harvest the sun's energy to grow.

**Farm Tech Field** shows how scientists use technology to meet new challenges in agriculture.

**Animal Corral** allows visitors to try their hand at milking a life-sized cow, and compare it with modern technology that allows for faster hands-free milking.

**HomeGROWn** is a learning opportunity about growing food in the backyard, and includes a flock of chickens and chance to see how worms are a garden's best friend.

**Fermentation Station** demonstrates the science behind making craft beer, wine, cheese and bread. Visitors try hands-on beer brewing and wine fermentation experiences and enjoy locally produced, seasonal menu pairings with beer and wine made in Saint Louis.

**Greenhouse** takes a look at how food can be grown in new ways beyond fields.

Admission to GROW is free. For more information, visit <http://slsc.org/GROW>.