

# 2008 Cattle Industry Annual

## CBB Chair Invites Change

Meet Dave Bateman, 2008 Cattlemen's Beef Board chairman.

by *Melissa Slagle*

**C**hange is all around us, inevitable and often a bit scary. But it's what you do with change that matters ... You can see it as a barrier or an amazing opportunity.

This February, the Cattlemen's Beef Board (CBB) elected a new president who embraces change and sees it as a stepping-stone to greater things to come. Meet Dave Bateman, who says, "The only people that like change are wet babies, and they cry about it."

A fourth-generation cattleman from Oregon, Ill., Bateman has faced adversity and change both in his home and professional life.

The farm has been in the family since 1896. The original family farm is located near Elburn in Kane County, which was at the time a premier cattle-raising county only 50 miles from the Union Stockyards in Chicago. With Bateman's father, his father, and his father before that all in the cattle business, Bateman naturally grew up working with cattle. He soon ventured out on his own in partnership with a mentor, rented a farm, and the two of them joined in a feeding operation with between 600 to 900 cattle per year in the late 1970s.

But just as farm and city have collided, farms have consolidated, and thus the markets changed, forcing Bateman and his family to adapt to a new way of operating their cattle operation.

In the years leading up to the sale of the farm, Bateman went to work with

his landlords and succeeded in growing a 200-acre row crop farm to 1,400 acres while feeding approximately 500 head per year.

In 1995, their lives began to change even more. Bateman's wife, Carol, was diagnosed with multiple sclerosis (MS), and in 1998, after developers bought the rented farm where they lived, they moved into town. That same year, he returned to Judson College to pursue "transferable job skills" and received his bachelor's degree in leadership and management. Then, in 2004, the bulk of the family farm was sold to a gravel company.

With the passing of his mother in 2006, Bateman's brother Rowland decided to move back to the 100+-year-old home place and began a 15-head cattle operation with the help of his son, Kent. Kent now works at the local co-op, but throughout high school and the following years, Kent had worked with Bateman. "Now our fifth generation, I like to think I've helped train and encourage Kent in this business. His boys, Ryan and Travis, with 4-H calves, now represent the sixth generation."

Knowing the family farm was in good hands, and being located nearer the city, he changed his employment status to what he refers to as "semi-retired," but meanwhile retains 40 acres of the original farm and owns 200 head of cattle that are custom-fed for him.

In his spare time, Bateman answered a call to ministry and is an intentional interim pastor at a church in Belvidere, Ill.

He has had church consulting schooling, mediation conflict training and is also a trained transitional minister. His "job" is to examine the history of a church, the sources of conflict and ways to resolve it, and to try to find ways to plan a better future for tomorrow so mistakes of the past aren't repeated.

"Because of my continued education, I find many similarities in my dual role in life. As we look at the beef industry, we are tied to some

traditions and reluctant to change. The transition from what we've always been and done to some new ways of thinking are equally difficult," Bateman says. "Part of what I do is help people see what can be."

As a lifelong industry volunteer and now as CBB chairman, Bateman says, "I believe in what we do, I believe in our product, I believe in what the industry stands for, I believe in the history from which we come, and I believe that there's a future for us as we adapt to a changing society. I hope to be a catalyst to help that change move in a positive direction."

Change is an evolving process. Bateman says beef producers need to continue to work with industry partners to stretch the limit of dollars the checkoff has in order to become the greatest influence possible in the marketplace.

"We also need to work very diligently toward developing new products to help transition into the next generation of consumers. In the short term, we'll be faced with difficult decisions as an industry because of shrinking dollars — which means we need to recognize we can't be all things to all people."



PHOTO COURTESY CATTLEMEN'S BEEF BOARD

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**—Dave Bateman**



# Convention & Trade Show

As a Beef Board leader looking ahead, he says he hopes he can encourage more participation in the planning process, with more producer involvement and producer direction. "It's imperative that producers claim ownership of checkoff-funded programs. Every voice can be heard — you can make a difference and influence the direction of the industry. It only requires involvement and commitment."

Since his nomination to the CBB by beef organizations in Illinois and

his appointment by the U.S. Secretary of Agriculture in 2000, Bateman has served in various leadership positions in agricultural industries, beginning as a director of county affiliate organizations and continuing through state and national service on committees, committee chairmanships and officer positions and most recently as CBB vice chairman. Among others, Bateman is a past president of the Kane County Corn Growers Association, the DeKalb/Kane

Cattlemen's Association, the Illinois Beef Association and is a long-time member of the Illinois Livestock Advisory Board of Commissioners.

Bateman and his wife, Carol, have two daughters. Denyse, who with husband Don Christensen, has three children Kyle, Katie and Sam; and Christine, who with husband Tim Carey, has a son, Gavin.



## Checkoff receives clean bill of health

How well do you know your checkoff? Without prompting, 87% of beef and dairy producers had heard of the program, and 68% consider themselves somewhat or very well informed, according to a recent study by Aspen Media & Market Research, Boulder, Colo. In total, random telephone interviews were conducted with a representative sample of 1,225 beef and dairy producers nationwide between Dec. 27, 2007, and Jan. 10, 2008, to determine their awareness of, attitudes toward and concerns about the Beef Checkoff Program.

"The Cattlemen's Beef Board (CBB) has conducted this independent survey biannually throughout the history of the checkoff to make sure it's funding the programs and producing the results cattle producers who pay the checkoff expect of their program," said CBB member Richard Nielson, a producer from Ephraim, Utah, and chair of the Joint Producer Communications Committee.

"In addition, the results of this survey help guide program recommendations of the Producer Communications Committee," he explained. "Our ultimate goal is to develop a plan of work for communicating information about Beef Checkoff Program investments to the beef and dairy producers, and importers who pay the checkoff, with particular emphasis on providing clear, consistent and no-nonsense answers to producer questions."

The study found that producers continue to have very favorable attitudes toward the beef checkoff program. Currently, seven in 10 approve of the program. The results have been similar throughout time. In the past five years, approval rates have ranged between 68% and 73%. Producers' support for the checkoff program has been consistent through the years — during the past decade, a majority always have approved of it, with positive ratings of 60% or more.

For the most part, checkoff support has remained steady in spite of changing economic conditions or extensive news coverage. Economic conditions have been cyclical — they have improved and declined. Nielson notes that while economic conditions have influenced producers' outlook toward their industry, this has not had a large effect upon their approval levels regarding the checkoff.

"These surveys establish benchmarks and identify areas of focus for future communications planning," he added.

When producers are "very well informed" about checkoff

activities, they're more likely to report a higher approval rating. The research also found that the proportion of producers who disapprove of the checkoff has remained virtually unchanged in the past 12 months. Moreover, the disapproval rates have remained lower in the past few years.

Industry leadership last year recommended that producer communications be again conducted by CBB directly.

"By bringing producer communications under the direction of the CBB, we hope producers hear about their checkoff investments directly rather than through a contractor,"

Nielson continued. "This isn't to suggest we weren't doing a good job in the past. On the contrary. Two-thirds of producers polled reported they are very or somewhat well informed, which means our messages are on target. What this ultimately shows is a positive correlation between improved and targeted communications efforts and educated producers. This is a good indicator of program success."

Knowledge and education about the beef checkoff continue to be predictors of favorability toward it. Producers who are "very" or "somewhat" well informed are more likely to approve of the checkoff, particularly among those who say they are very well informed.

Among this group, 79% approve of the program (48% of them strongly), while only 14% disapprove.

A program with the visibility of the checkoff is bound to be talked about or in the news from time to time. It is important to find out just how visible the program is and how producers perceive the coverage. The results indicate that many producers continue to pay attention to recent checkoff news. The visibility of the program remains high. Currently, half of producers have seen, read or heard something about the beef checkoff in the past six months.

So if you're reading this article right now, you're one of the 50% of producers mentioned above. But don't stop there — read more about checkoff activities at [www.beefboard.org](http://www.beefboard.org) or [www.beefboardmeeting.com](http://www.beefboardmeeting.com).

**Cattlemen's Beef Board conducts producer attitude survey to monitor checkoff activities.**

