

# BEEF COUNCIL bullhorn

## "Why Sustainability?"

by Ethan Lane, Vice President,  
Government Affairs, NCBA

**W**hen the topic of sustainability comes up in conversation in cattle circles, it's common to see heads shaking. It's not a topic we like to discuss in our industry – primarily because it's so often raised with bad intentions and worse information. We bristle because we've been doing things right in our business for many generations and it's difficult to accept that outsiders have influence in how we're doing business.

Increasingly, though, that's exactly what's happening. In the case of sustainability, consumers have decided they ought to have a better understanding and perhaps even a say in how their food is produced.

Now, we don't have to like the fact that consumers and in many cases outside interest groups have turned a spotlight on beef production, but there is tremendous interest in how food is produced. You can probably trace the origins back to the rise of Food Network and celebrity chefs, but special interests also played a role in the attention that's paid to modern food production and the practices used to raise cattle and produce beef. The natural evolution of that interest was the conversation about sustainability and whether a product is viewed by consumers as "sustainable."

Regardless of whether we might like the word or agree with its definition, we're being judged on how we do things in this business. That same scrutiny is being applied to every single product that goes into a shopper's cart. The folks who are buying beef care about what we did to the product along the way and we have a good story to tell. But we all know we can tell it until we're blue in the face and not many folks are going to listen. To get people to pay attention to the

beef sustainability story, we must rely on others to help tell it, and perhaps more importantly, verify the story that's being told. In many cases, the groups telling our story haven't always had our best interests in mind. One group that has come up in conversations recently is the World Wildlife Fund (WWF).

To set the record straight up front, NCBA isn't a member of WWF and WWF is not a member of NCBA. Neither organization receives any support, financial or otherwise, from the other. Likewise, no checkoff dollars have been sent to WWF. Both NCBA and WWF are members of the Global Roundtable for Sustainable Beef (GRSB) and the U.S. Roundtable for Sustainable Beef (USRSB) and these efforts are funded strictly with NCBA membership dollars. Here again, no checkoff funds have been used to fund GRSB or USRSB. NCBA participates in both GRSB and USRSB at the direction of its members and we participate to make certain that the voice of cattlemen and cattlemen is heard in conversations about cattle and beef production practices.

Groups like WWF and many others have tremendous influence over corporations in the United States and most foreign countries. That influence extends to the purchasing decisions that are being made by corporations like Costco, Walmart, McDonald's, Sysco and many others. The influence of WWF and other non-governmental organizations (NGOs) extends to Wall Street and the investment banks that provide funding for these massive global corporations. Here too the NGOs hold significant power.

The sustainability of a product like beef can be measured through a life-cycle assessment (LCA), a process that is well-documented and backed by science. The beef industry, thanks to the Beef Checkoff, has already completed its own LCA and it continues to update and refine the results of that work, which shows that beef producers have always been sustainable and continue to become more sustainable with each passing year.

Cattle producers have always been good stewards of our natural resources and we're continually making our animals more efficient. But the sustainability of a product doesn't begin or end at the ranch gate. It extends backward to the feed and minerals we supply the cowherd. It also encompasses the fuel used to ship packages of beef to distribution centers and the refrigeration used to keep it cold in the grocery store. It's perhaps the longest and most complex supply chain of any food item.

We know there's a lot of misinformation about cattle and beef and the impact it has on the environment. We know that some of the folks spreading that misinformation sit across the table from us in conversations about sustainability, but frankly that's why it's important for us to be at that table in the first place. Without us that conversation will still happen, but it will happen only amongst our detractors, and without an advocate for our strong record of sustainable production.

We also know that because we have a seat at the table during GRSB and USRSB meetings, we've been able to educate both NGO representatives and participating corporations about our resource stewardship and the improvements being made by the entire beef supply chain. Because of these conversations and because of the beef industry's work to complete an LCA, we've been able to demonstrate our sustainability and keep their buyers in the market for our product, instead of shifting to chicken or pork, which are still our two biggest competitors by a wide margin.

The world around us is changing and we're not headed back to a simpler time. Ever. The world in which we're producing cattle becomes more complex by the day and frankly that's why NCBA exists, to help lead the industry through the challenges we face. We might not like the topic of sustainability but that's one of the many ways NCBA provides value to our members. We sit at the table and represent the interests of our members in

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conversations they'd rather not have, with people they don't always agree with.

Those conversations aren't always easy or popular and we're going to face our share of critics for having them, but that's part of the job when you serve as the trusted leader and definitive voice of the beef industry. ■

## Gather 'Round the Drool Log with Beef. It's What's For Dinner. This Holiday Season

Just in time for the holidays, *Beef. It's What's For Dinner.* released a new craveable Beef Drool Log video sure to "spice up" any gathering and celebration. The Beef Drool Log is a two-and-a-half-hour video featuring a beautiful Prime Rib Roast cooking to perfection on a rotisserie over open flame. The video pays homage to the iconic Yule Log but

puts a tasty spin on it like only beef can.

The Beef Drool Log can be found on YouTube and is sure to add some holiday flavor to your workplace, a dinner party, or a night at home with the family. Shorter versions of the mouthwatering video will be showcased in the Beef Checkoff-funded *Beef. It's What's For Dinner.* holiday digital marketing efforts on Hulu, YouTube, Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, Pinterest and LinkedIn. Holiday moviegoers will also have the opportunity to enjoy the Beef Drool Log in National CineMedia Noovie pre-show in select movie theaters in 10 states between November 22 and December 5.

Nine state beef councils are supporting in-state theater promotions with dollars from the half of the \$1-per-head national Beef Checkoff they manage. Councils in Washington, Nebraska, Tennessee, Pennsylvania, Kansas, Missouri, Idaho, Iowa and Florida have committed funds to the effort, as has the Northeast Beef Promotion Initiative. Overall, 212 theaters with more than 2,700 screens will be participating in this aspect of the campaign.

The Beef Drool Log is the latest video in the "Keep Sizzlin'" advertisement collection from *Beef. It's What's For Dinner.* The original sizzle video, featuring a strip

streak crackling and popping as it cooks in a cast iron skillet, has been viewed more than 33 million times. Additional sizzle videos showcasing the popular beef preparation methods of smoking, stir-fry, sous vide, and grilling have more than 81 million views.

"Real beef's great taste and 'drool worthiness' cannot be replicated, which is why we think sizzle videos resonate so well with consumers," said Season Solorio, senior executive director of brand marketing and communications, at the National Cattlemen's Beef Association, a contractor to the Beef Checkoff. "The holidays are the perfect time to build on the sizzle concept we know consumers love and add a touch of nostalgia by pairing two holiday favorites – beef and the traditional Yule Log video. The resulting Beef Drool Log is sure to be an instant holiday favorite and crowd pleaser."

"We're excited many state beef councils are working with our national team to extend the impact of this campaign," said Laurie Munns, a cattle producer from Hansel Valley, Utah, and Federation of State Beef Councils chair. "This cooperative effort demonstrates the value of a coordinated state and national partnership."

The Beef Drool Log is a reminder that consumers love to gather around a roast for the holidays – be it on a screen or on the dinner table. In fact, 60 percent of annual roast sales are accounted for in December, according to IRI/Freshlook. And, with more than 80 percent of beef grading the highest available USDA quality grades of Prime or Choice, it's easier than ever to enjoy the juicy and delicious flavor of tender beef. ■



State beef councils help promote a new spin on Yule Log with holiday roast video

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