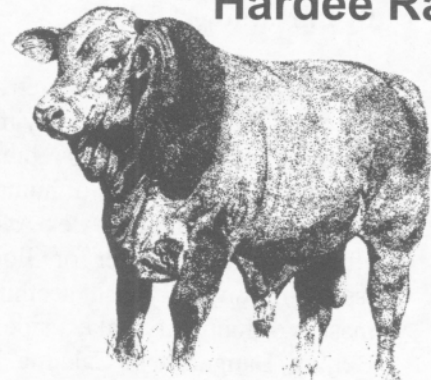


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**Hardee Rancher****Beef and Forage**  
**NEWSLETTER****WINTER 2009****CALENDAR OF EVENTS**

January 15 – Florida Cattlemen’s Institute and Allied Trade Show – Kissimmee, FL
January 26 – Southwest Florida Small Farmers Network Meeting, Organic Farm Tour – Arcadia, FL
February 5 – Florida Organic Growers/UF/IFAS Meeting, Manatee Extension Service – Palmetto, FL
February 10 – Tree Based Alternative Enterprises Workshop/Field Day – Sarasota, FL
February 16 – 21 – Hardee County Fair, Hardee County Fairgrounds – Wauchula, FL
February 18 – Hardee County Fair Livestock Sale, Hardee County Cattlemen’s Arena – Wauchula, FL

**Mention of product names does not constitute endorsement by the University of Florida/IFAS, Florida Cooperative Extension Service, or the Hardee County Board of County Commissioners.**

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## Feeding the World One Technology at a Time

By Burt Rutherford

Its likely most cattlemen haven't trod the streets of New York City very much. For good reason, what with its reputation as a seething, crowded mass of humanity. However, according to Alex Avery with the Hudson Institute Center for Global Food Issues, if you really want seething, crowded masses of humanity, take a side trip to Beijing, Bangalore or Calcutta. There, he says, you will get a glimpse of the world's future...and yours.

"Bottom line, world food demand 40 years from now will be at least twice as high as it is today, perhaps closer to tripling. That means that by the year 2050, humanity will have to produce twice as much food every year, year after year, than we currently produce."

That's a problem and an opportunity, he told cattlemen attending *BEEF* magazine's recent *BEEF* Quality Summit (BQS) in Colorado Springs. The problem is this: "We don't have a lot of additional farmland we can bring into production to meet that challenge."

And the opportunity? If allowed to use the production technologies available to us, we don't have to.

**World population growing.** The world population is 6.5 billion people and is projected to grow to 8.5 to 9 billion by 2050, Avery says. From a purely practical standpoint, that's a lot more mouths to feed in a relatively short period of time.

However, more and more of those new and hungry mouths will come into the world in much more affluent surroundings than did their parents. And it's the growing affluence of major populations like China and India that will drive the escalating worldwide demand for food.

Avery points to China, which has 21% of the world's population. Over the last 12-14 years, Chinese meat consumption has more than doubled. "And they still eat, on a per-

capita basis, less than half the animal protein we eat in North America. The projections are, in 2045 or 2050; the Chinese will eat twice as much meat as they do today."

That's due to a worldwide truism – as populations grow more affluent, their consumption changes from a primarily plant-based diet to a meat-based diet. How can U.S. cattlemen supply beef's part of that global dietary increase in meat consumption without taking land away from wildlife and other uses? By doing what they have done, by and large, for the last 50+ years – taking advantage of production technologies that allow them to produce more pounds of beef per acre and per animal.

To prove that point, Avery undertook some research funded by the Get It group, a consortium of pharmaceutical companies that produce livestock growth promotants. Using data from the Leopold Center for Sustainable Agriculture at Iowa State University and the United Nations Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, Avery concluded that just by using growth promotants, cattlemen reduced the land required to produce 1 lb. of beef by 67% and greenhouse gas emissions from beef production by 40%.

On an acre-day basis, the data show that beef produced in an organic, grass-fed system requires 5.04 acre-days to produce 1 lb. of retail beef. A conventional feedyard finishing system without growth promotants takes 1.99 acre-days to produce 1 lb. of beef, and finishing cattle in a feedyard with the help of growth promotants nets 1.64 acre-days/1 lb. of consumable beef.

Put on an equivalent "miles-per-acre" (mpa) basis to make it more understandable, Avery says a conventional feedyard finishing system using growth promotants produces 52.3 mpa, higher than a Honda Civic hybrid. Cattle finished in a feedyard without growth promotants get 43 mpa, and cattle produced on an organic grass-fed system get 17 mpa, equivalent to a Hummer H3.

Avery says that more than 95% of the beef produced in the U.S. comes from a conventional feedyard production system

using growth promotants.

“Their use over the past 50+ years (since 1956) has proven beneficial not only to beef producers, but to consumers and the environment, who benefit from lower costs and more efficient use of scarce natural resources,” he says.

**Not just meat.** But it’s not just animal protein in the diet. “How many cotton outfits do you have in your closet?” he asked the BQS crowd. “We have a lot. And that takes acreage. Twenty, 30 years ago, the average Chinese had two outfits. The average (person in India) had two or three outfits. Compare that with your own wardrobe and that’s where they’re going. If every adult Chinese male has just one additional beer a week, that’s (an extra) 3.25 billion gals. of beer annually. That’s a lot of grain.”

There are only two ways to meet global food demand, Avery says. “We can take more land from nature or produce more per acre or per animal. No other human activity has greater impact on the environment than agriculture, and the more land-efficient we can make our agriculture, the more environmentally friendly it will be.” Using 1960 productivity levels, just to produce today’s food supply; we’d need to plow down an additional 15-20 million square miles of wildlife habitat. That’s Canada, the U.S., half of Brazil and half of Western Europe. That’s how much wildlife habitat has been saved by synthetic fertilizers, plant breeding, pesticides and yes, cattle hormones.”

**To read the entire report, go to [www.cgfi.org](http://www.cgfi.org).**

**Source: [www.BEEFmagazine.com](http://www.BEEFmagazine.com)**

## **Sustainability Showdown**

By: Loretta Sorensen

A research project aims to assay the input costs and overall profits of three grass-finishing systems

Even though there's a demand for grass-finished and organic grass-finished beef, is it cost effective for beef producers to provide that kind of product? That's the question a Midwest beef study hopes to answer. Terry Gompert, University of Nebraska-Lincoln Extension educator, says a Sustainable Agriculture Research and Education (SARE) grant is providing funds for a 2008-2009 study involving beef producers in Iowa, Wisconsin, Nebraska, Kansas and South Dakota. Margaret Smith, Iowa State University (ISU) Extension program specialist, and Laura Paine, Wisconsin Department of Agriculture Division of Agricultural Development, are also serving as study coordinators. “We’re gathering data from producers involved in three types of beef production,” Gompert says. “We want to analyze a comparative study that looks at both input costs and overall profits for organic grain-fed, organic grass-fed and grass-fed beef. The data will tell us if there's enough profit, or any profit, for low-input producers who use a forage system to fatten their cattle.” Gompert is assisting 12 producers in completing detailed documentation that will provide the study's analysis data. Smith and Paine are working with similar groups. The study's first challenge was to develop the structure of the form used to gather study information. “What we found in developing the form was that nearly all existing forms were used to gather information on feedlot production,” Gompert says. In creating the study questions, Gompert says administrators realized the complexity of documenting costs and profits from a grass-finished beef operation. “How do you allocate part of the ranch assets to ensure the accuracy of your figures?” Gompert asks. “If you're raising annual crops to finish your beef, how do you accurately allocate those costs in your operation? We eventually came up with those answers because we want to make sure the study documentation reflects real numbers.”

Gompert holds degrees in beef production with a focus on grazing management. He also owns a grass-fed beef operation.

### ***Producer input***

One portion of the project includes publication of case studies documenting several participating producers. The information should further assist beef producers involved in or considering a grass-fed operation. "It's no secret every beef producer has variations in their operation," Gompert says. "In South Dakota, we're gathering data from Pukwana grass-finished ranchers Julie Williams (DVM) and her husband Larry Wagner. We're also obtaining information from Tim Eisenbeis at Marion, who produces organic beef." "Neither Larry nor I like the numbers side of our operation," Williams says. "This will force us to take time to document our cost information. We feel like we have a lot more money when we're using solar collector leaves to produce most of our feed. What we really need to know is what it costs us per pound to raise a calf. That information will help us determine the value of our animals when we sell them." Gompert says the data from participating producers will be very valuable, even though the operations are very different. "A comparative study of the two processes with specific input costs and sales prices is what producers need in order to decide the kind of operation they're going to use," Gompert says. Although there are completed studies regarding the cost of producing beef, the researchers couldn't locate a study with the same focus as the one they developed. "We want producers who are considering grass-fed and/or organic beef to be able to review this study's results and identify the questions they need to ask before making any changes," Gompert says. "This study should help them decide if some aspects of grass-fed or organic beef are too expensive for them, especially if they have to make use of stored forage."

Gompert reports he found it difficult to locate organic grain-fed cattle because the cost of organic grain currently is about 50% higher than the cost of traditional grains. "Organic grain-fed beef is absolutely not profitable right now," Gompert says. "Corn is just too high; consequently it's pretty clear to producers that they're not going to make a profit with that type of product in the short run." Organic grass-fed beef producers face entirely different issues than organic grain-fed, beef producers. They need to carefully analyze input costs and operational requirements and changes to make the right decisions for their operation.

### ***The issue of forage supply***

"The biggest challenge grass-fed producers face is having a high-quality chain of forage available 12 consecutive months," Gompert says. "We can put together high-quality silage and hay, windrow grazing and plant annual crops and graze them late into the fall. We can use native plants and improved pastures and manage all of them appropriately so we have the highest quality feed." "High tech" isn't a term producers think of when considering grazing management, but Gompert says learning to effectively produce and use forage requires a significant amount of planning and strategic development. "Some of this doesn't come naturally and we're really in the learning stages of knowing how to make the most of our forages," Gompert says. "We need to consider a large variety of forage types and forage-management plans in order to fully explore our options." While he doesn't have the data he needs to begin developing an analysis, Gompert believes grass-finished beef will prove to be more cost-efficient than other types of production. He says consumer demand is pushing producers toward grass-finished and organic beef products. However, if costs are prohibitive, consumers won't actually purchase those types of beef.

“Consumers have to realize the cost of producing this kind of meat might be more expensive than traditional methods,” Gompert says. “If they're willing to pay the added cost, producers will do well. But if the costs prove too high, that market will go away. “Feedlots have been popular because producers could efficiently produce lower-cost meat with a high-quality feed,” Gompert says. “It's been a good model, but some other models are being expressed right now and we need to seriously consider them.”

*Loretta Sorensen is a freelance writer based in Yankton, SD.*

### **Definitions**

**Grass-fed beef** is fed solely on forage. The most difficult element is developing a 12-month forage supply of the quality cattle need to gain.

**Organic grass-fed beef** is fed on forage certified as organic, which means the land has had no type of chemical applied to it for a specific number of years and no chemicals are used to manage the grasses.

**Organic grain-fed beef** is fed on grains certified as organic, which means the cropland was chemical free for a specific number of years and no chemicals were used to produce the grain.

**Source:** [www.BEEFmagazine.com](http://www.BEEFmagazine.com)

### **With organic agriculture on the rise, Gainesville organization extends growers a hand to transition to organic production**

GAINESVILLE, Fla. – Florida Organic Growers (FOG) will partner with UF IFAS to present a free workshop Thursday, Feb. 5 at the Manatee County Extension Office in Palmetto for farmers interested in transitioning to organic production. The workshop is intended for commercial producers interested in transitioning to

organic production and will include an update on financial support for organic transition made available by the 2008 Farm Bill.

The workshop is part of FOG’s program that offers farmers free technical assistance to transition to organic production. By pairing growers with crop advisors experienced with organic production methods, the program gives growers the support, technical know-how and assurance they may need or desire to successfully make the transition. Organic regulations allow certification of split operations so producers have the option of transitioning a portion of their total acreage. The U.S. organic food industry has grown from \$1 billion in sales in 1990 to an estimated \$23 billion in 2008 and is expected to average 18 percent annual growth through 2010.

“The organic marketplace continues to expand and Florida growers may want to seriously consider the market opportunities,” FOG Executive Director Marty Mesh said. In addition to assisting transitioning growers, the program is open to any Florida fruit or vegetable producer who is interested in reducing pesticide use or switching to lower-risk chemicals. Interested growers please contact Matt Vargas at (352) 377-6345 or [matt@foginfo.org](mailto:matt@foginfo.org). More information, including the application to participate in the program, can be found at [www.foginfo.org/epa](http://www.foginfo.org/epa).