

News From the Bullpen



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Let me introduce myself, I am the new guy in the Highlands County Extension Office, Gary Mikulecky. I am the County Extension Director and the Extension Agent working with livestock producers. I admit to being a native of Minnesota but have been converted to a card carrying, certified to vote, Florida resident.

A little about myself, I grew up on a dairy farm and was a 4-H member for 10 years showing dairy cattle. I milked cows until graduating from the University of Minnesota with a B.S. degree in Animal Science and then served in the US Army. Additional experiences include assistant cashier in a bank, owner/operator of small grains farm and adjusting and selling Multi-Peril Crop Insurance. Most recently I have been an Extension Educator for 12 years with the University of Minnesota Extension Service in Wilkin County, Minnesota. My wife, Eileen, Alex the dog, and I now live in Sebring. Please stop in the Highlands County Extension Office so I can meet you and learn more about this piece of paradise called Highlands County.

Where is the beef industry headed?

As part of my introduction to the beef industry in Florida I was asked the question, "Where is the beef industry headed?" I consulted my Extension resources and searched the WWW and I would like share an interesting portion of this information with you.

The subject today is called "The 4:30 Dilemma." This is the challenge facing the person in charge of preparing dinner and not knowing what to serve or how to prepare it. For an increasing number of Americans the five most common ways of make a dinner in the US are:

- * Open a carton
- * Open a box
- * Open a can
- * Open a bag

* Open a phone book

The reason for this? Americans are starved - not for food, but for time. Seventy percent of the American women, the traditional food preparers, are in the work force. The number of single parent and double-income households is on the rise and working hours are longer for both men and women. Fifty-one percent say they are too tired to cook at the end of the day. Time starvation is here. Little Brad has a ball game and sister Susie has a swim meet in an hour.

What's a parent to do? Yes, we reach for food-in-a-flash. According to Dr. Brad Morgan, Oklahoma State University, assistant professor of animal science, two-thirds of the dinner decisions are made on the same day, and 75% are made at 4:30 in the afternoon. (I know that 50% of my dinners will be leftovers, so no decision to make.) He further adds 60% of these shoppers buy pre-cut ready-to-serve vegetables and salads. Forty percent of these shoppers spend less than 30 minutes on meal preparation. All thanks to the many food-in-a-flash products made with beef that are available. These products are microwaveable or pre-marinated for a better cooking and tasting experience. We are all looking for an instant "tummy heaven."

What does the "4:30 Dilemma" have to do with raising beef? The only way to increase the flow of dollars into the beef system and enhance producer profit opportunities is to increase consumer expenditures. To do this we need to provide what the consumer wants - beef in a carton, box, can, bag, or on the phone.

Three of the major criticisms of the beef industry have been product variability, lack of consistency, and lack of convenience. The recent U.S. palatability study (Source: Smith, CSU) implies that one in four steaks produced does not meet consumer acceptability. Other studies have indicated that figure may be one in five, or even one in six, but all studies imply that high percentage of product produced by the beef industry does not meet consumer acceptability.

Nationally and globally there is extremely strong market demand for Choice and high Choice grading product, yet, the percent of cattle grading Choice has dropped from 76 percent in 1975 to current levels of 48 to 49 percent. Equally, food safety issues have plagued the beef industry in recent years, even though the U.S. beef supply is the safest supply anywhere in the world.

Numerous consumer surveys continue to show that even though our consuming public may feel they should eat poultry or other products for health or price reasons, these same consumers basically imply they want to eat beef. The growth of the menu share, the growth of beef's role in food service (ie: restaurants, deli outlets, etc.) has continued to grow. The most exciting developments in the last two years have been the introduction of a wide variety of new beef products. Particularly exciting is that many of these new products market lower valued parts of the beef carcass. These new products will enhance value of the whole carcass.

The beef processing industry, to satisfy consumer demands, wants and needs beef that is uniform, consistent, and convenient. What practices can producers focus on to produce the kind of calves that can fit this market? The producers will need to develop a genetic program, produce uniform cattle, do source verification, maintain records and have a business plan.

Develop a genetic program. It's extremely important that producers not focus solely on carcass traits in selecting sires for their operation because of the numerous factors that influence profitability including pivotal factors such as growth and survivability. In contrast, more and more producers will include carcass traits in their selection program. Those carcass traits will revolve around cattle that have the ability to meet quality standards as defined by quality grades and muscling criteria as defined by yield grade and dressing percentage. The use of breeds with carcass information and the use of sires that contain EPDs for traits such as marbling, loin eye area, and retail product will become a more common bull selection criteria.

Create uniformity in your cattle. One extremely important attribute that cattle need to possess is uniformity. This is uniformity of weight, growth potential, and carcass traits. Achieving uniformity is difficult on most operations. To accomplish this, it's important that producers focus on short calving seasons, a uniform cow herd from a genetic standpoint, and the utilization of bulls of a common breed and sire genetic linkage. Coupling a short calving season with a distinct genetic plan and a sound health program will go a long way towards creating uniformity of the calf crop.

Source verification. It appears many of the new marketing options will strive for some form of source verification, which implies that the producer of the calves will identify the calves and simply "stand behind" the calves as they move through the production chain. It's been interesting that most producers are very comfortable with this concept, and it certainly inspires considerable confidence on the part of the retailers and the consuming public knowing that cattle are source verified.

Maintain records and have a business plan. Record keeping will become more important in production systems in the future. As calves move through the production chain, those calves that contain information regarding their genetic background, health program and, describe the general management used, will have distinct advantages over calves not containing that type of information. In addition, more cattle operations are developing business plans that include good financial records identifying what it costs to produce a pound of calf; what it costs to maintain the cow herd; and, what profit potential may exist if they participate in some of these alternative marketing programs. It is impossible to measure the economic merits of programs unless you have some baseline information to refer back to. We need to be more dedicated to positively changing the beef industry to satisfy our consumers. These practices can all be done - and I will be discussing them in the future. We also need to be more knowledgeable about our product--a food item. If you haven't been in the grocery store lately and visited the beef counter you should. See what the new products are and how they fit the consumers desire for convenience -- open a carton, box can bag or phone book. You should also take a look at your competition's product case. Count the number of poultry products (chicken and turkey) that are "consumer friendly." The beef industry has started to change and has developed many new products. We need to provide the calves that meet processor needs and consumer demands for their bite of "tummy heaven."

Adapted from material provided by
Larry Corah, Director, Production Systems, Montana State University
Wayne R. Wagner, Livestock Specialist, West Virginia University Extension Service.
BEEF INDUSTRY LONG RANGE PLAN 2001-2004
[HTTP://WWW.MOBEEF.ORG/LRP.HTM#INDUSTRYPRIORITY](http://www.mobeef.org/lrp.htm#industrypriority)

OPPORTUNITIES

Beef Producers Educational Marketing Tour

Florida Farm Bureau in conjunction with the University of Florida Dean of Extension and the Florida Cattlemen's Association has put together a "Beef Producers Educational Marketing Tour" for November 27 - December 1, 2001. This tour will focus on different segments of beef production from the cow/calf operation to the packer.

You will be touring in the state of Oklahoma and working to build relationships with stockers, feedlots and others that will help improve the profitability of the Florida calf.

Tour is limited to the first 30 producers, so get your names in early. If you have any questions regarding this tour, please call 352-374-1542. Frankie Hall, Assistant Director, Ag Policy, Florida Farm Bureau

Federation. PO box 147030 Gainesville, FL 32614-7030.

Cattle and Forage Field Day October 11, 2001 at Ona.

Please call 863-735-1314 for more information.

For questions or comments regarding this publication contact



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