

CREATE POSITIVE BUZZ

Retail meat trends analyst urges cattlemen to join the conversation.

by Natalie Jones, Certified Angus Beef LLC

Connect with the changing food culture to keep beef at the center of more plates. That's advice from Anne-Marie Roerink of 210 Analytics, who spoke at the 2019 Feeding Quality Forum in Amarillo, Texas.

Retailers, "key partners with the meat industry," follow Roerink's annual "Power of Meat" surveys. The latest noted 86% of Americans consider themselves "meat-eaters."

That's old news to the national media, however.

"The biggest media debate right now is on plant-based eating," she said. "To meat or not to meat."

Her annual survey identified minor diet categories of "flexitarian" (mostly plant-based with occasional meat) and the increasingly "hip" vegan.

However, headlines don't reflect the trendlines, Roerink said. Meat sold at retail adds up to \$90 billion, while plant-based alternatives linger below \$1 billion. Meat sales would climb if younger shoppers were to gain kitchen confidence and begin to stock up.

"One of our biggest issues in the meat industry is the fact that people's refrigerators and freezers are empty," she said. "We need to get people back to planning and being part of their inspiration to

get meat into their fridge, on their weekly menus."

Consumers are uncomfortable

shopping for meat and trying to prepare beef, so they only buy enough for one meal or a few days at a time.

Generations Y ("millennials") and Z rely on brands to add confidence, and Roerink says that's an opportunity for premium leaders such as the *Certified Angus Beef*® (CAB®) brand.

"Where millennials have no knowledge base, they trust the brands that deliver," she said. "As for getting people to buy more

beef more often, there's no better trigger than a positive eating experience."

Fit the pot

New technology helps the young shoppers who grew up with it, but everything is connected.

Nutritional, emotional and physical wellness all tie back to food as consumers focus on wants vs. needs, Roerink said. They look at product attributes, transparency and convenience.

"The Instant Pot® and air fryer are helping millennials expand their culinary comfort zones," she said, to prepare more beef items than just the few they're buying now because of the variety they offer.

"Working together as an industry, we can get in on the ground level of that new technology and really tie our beef items in with that as well," Roerink said.

Focus on the good

Consumers doubt beef sustainability and production practices because "all they hear is everything we do wrong." She said cattlemen still enjoy a high level of trust, however, and need to "talk about all we do right," and point out facts such as 99% of households consume meat.

"Get active on social

media and talk to people about how you raise your animals and how your family is involved, or invite your neighbors over for a tour of the ranch," Roerink said, noting a transition from linear to circular food chains with more consumer input at every link.

European retail meat trends often come to America 10 years later, she said. Across the Atlantic, plant-based items have their

own section, earned from environmental benefit claims. Stores feature a wider variety of choices than in the United States, but she said those trends are coming here.

A meat specialist in The Netherlands told Roerink, "Trust me, I fought it as long as I could. But,

once that sign was in there, I just couldn't fight it any more ... We realized that by embracing the fact that some people want a plant-based alternative, we actually did better in meat. My meat sales are actually up." Barbecue suggestions include meat, fish and vegetarian.

"Sometimes we have to keep an open mind in order to still be on the plate. Even a blended item like a mushroom burger is still 75% beef. We can meet the consumer a little bit halfway," she said, envisioning a future where "revenue is the reward for doing things right. And the right thing means looking at how society is changing, and changing with it."

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