

One Steer: How it affects our lives

by HAYLEY HENDERSON

One steer Have you ever thought about how much difference one steer can make in your life? We all drive down the highway and, every once in a while, we might pass a feedyard or a pasture full of cattle; but have we ever stopped to think about how much just one of those steers can impact our lives?

The cattle industry is one of the most important sectors of our economy in Texas, as well as in the United States. The cattle industry has a great importance on everyone's lives, whether we eat meat or only vegetables.

The economic impact is great. One steer provides countless numbers of jobs, directly or indirectly, that impact people all over the world. Everything about just one steer has the power to touch many lives in different ways. Some are obvious and some, not so obvious.

Nutrition

A 1,000-pound (lb.) steer will yield about a 640-lb. carcass. That carcass will yield about 320 lb. of edible meat, which can be processed into 32 different cuts that will be able to feed a potential of 384 people. This steer is touching 384 people's lives just by being a healthy meal for them. You might eventually feed this to your family to provide the nourishing iron and protein that they need to stay healthy.

Aside from the nutritional aspects, the beef we eat can also be a center point in our lives. Beef is often the main course as we sit down to dinner and talk over the day's events. It is also the focal point for the upcoming summer holidays as family and friends come together on a sunny afternoon to enjoy barbecue and to visit about days gone by.

Byproducts

A steer also yields 150 lb. of salable bone, which can be turned into bone meal for a farmer's or gardener's fertilizer or into dog or cat food to feed the family pet.

A 1,000-lb. steer yields one hide weighing about 60 lb., around 150 square feet (sq. ft.) of leather, which can be turned into saddles, upholstery for cars and furniture, shoes, and many more items.

A steer of that size will also yield 110 lb. of fat, which is used to make fertilizers, butter, candles and scented soaps that girls, such as myself, love to use.

Almost every part of a steer can be utilized.

Another important way that one steer touches our lives is through the medicinal value it has. This one hits extremely close to home for me.

My 13-year-old little sister was diagnosed with juvenile diabetes in September of 1998. She will be insulin-dependent for the rest of her life and will have to give herself shots of that life-saving insulin twice a day. The insulin they get from that one steer will not only help keep her healthy, but millions of others like her all over the world. This animal could provide insulin to save you or a family member someday.

This is not the only medicine from cattle, though. One steer can also provide people with epinephrine, thyroid extract and estrogen, as well as many other much-needed medicines. Every part of that one steer can be used to touch a person's life in one way or another.

Environment

That one steer doesn't just affect our lives after it is processed; its effect begins as soon as it is born. Many rangelands all over the United States are unfit for farming, but they grow grass in abundance, grass that cattle eat. Humans do not eat grass; it is useless to us. But a steer is able to convert grass into a human-consumable form of protein, one we need to stay alive. This utilizes land that would otherwise be useless to Americans.

A 1,000-lb. steer eats about 3,200 lb. of feed, mostly corn, in the feedlot. Because of the large quantity of beef cattle on feed in the United States, this helps keep the farming economy viable — by eating much of the corn and other grains grown in the United States.

Wildlife is also affected by the rangeland that cattle live on. Seventy-five percent of all the nation's wildlife lives on farms and ranches. The percentage of wildlife living on ranches vs. other environments has increased from 80% in 1990 to 87% in 1996.

This is good for the hunter and even the farmer or rancher who is able to make a second business out of this increase in the wildlife resources. By charging for the recreational use of the land, landowners can see a substantial increase in their incomes.

Spread the word

I have been involved in FFA for two years now. I have attended leadership

contests, meats-judging contests, and my favorite, the 71st National FFA Convention in Kansas City. Everywhere I have gone, I have seen agriscience-fair projects, heard speeches and programs, and been taught about many different subjects, but I haven't heard anything being taught on how the cattle industry affects our lives.

If the cattle industry is so important, why aren't people doing anything about spreading the knowledge?

As an FFA member, I believe that there are many things that people, like myself, can do to teach others. I am competing in the FFA agriscience fair this year in the food-science division. In this I will be comparing beef to other meat products and helping to educate the public on beef's advantages.

Other things that people can do are take leadership positions, give speeches on the subject, go to elementary schools and teach children why beef is good for them, and we could also write a series of news articles for our local papers.

These are just some of the things that FFA members and others can do to educate people about how much impact the beef industry has on every aspect of our lives.

One steer benefits our lives in many ways. The most obvious is the nutritious benefits it gives us. There are the fertilizers, upholstery, soaps and other items derived from the byproducts of one steer. One that is very important to my family is the medicines gained from the animal.

Farmers benefit because of the tons of grain eaten by cattle all over the country, and 75% of wildlife live on farms and ranches. This is good for the farmer, the rancher and the hunter.

We now know all of this information, but there are many out there who don't. I would like to challenge you, my fellow FFA members, and myself to teach our fellow citizens about this great economic impact, for if we don't, who will?

Who could have ever imagined the impact on our lives of just one steer?



Editor's Note: This article, published by the American Angus Association as part of the PACE program, was written as a speech by Hayley Henderson, a 16-year-old FFA member from Childress, Texas.