



Outside the Box

by **TOM FIELD**, professor of animal science, Colorado State University

Would you rather?

One of my son's favorite games to ease the boredom of driving was to play "Would you rather?" The object of the game was to provide two choices that put the respondent in the position of having to choose the lesser of two evils — for example, would you rather be hugged by a grizzly bear or kiss a snake?

As we approach a new year, we all tend to ask ourselves a series of questions that help us to consider our druthers and preferences for positive change. Hopefully, we are blessed with opportunities to choose options that are beneficial and fulfilling as opposed to picking between two undesirables.

In that spirit, my druthers for 2008 would include the following:

- An open beef export market that makes U.S. beef available to consumers worldwide.
- Sanity and common sense in governmental policy relative to water resources, energy, environmental issues and the marketplace.
- Breakthroughs in product development, food safety

enhancement and enhancement of beef value.

- A return to the core values of our heritage, including maintaining civility and a long-term perspective when confronted with difficult issues.

Global market access

Some thought leaders believe that global demand for meat will nearly double during the next two decades due to the rising economic wealth of consumers in both developed and developing nations. Pork and poultry are likely to lead the charge, but beef demand by all projections will also increase. Assuring beef's quality, safety and wholesomeness will be critical in adding momentum to an already favorable market.

However, to realize this potential, the markets in Korea and Japan need to be fully reopened, and the United States must make a decision as to their role in the global marketplace. As attractive as protectionist policy may be in the short run, the industry cannot generate wealth in the long term without a strong global focus in the beef supply chain.

The old Irish blessing of "May you live in interesting times" has never been more appropriate when it comes to policy issues affecting the cattle industry. The industry has no choice but to maintain a strong and reasoned voice in the policy debate. Two major topics will be at the forefront of debate in 2008 — energy and water.

Worldwide demand for beef will increase at double the rate of domestic demand. Increases in the human population will largely take place outside of our borders and thus access to these markets will be fundamentally more important in the future as a result.

Profitable international trade will require that the U.S. is effective in its ability to swap imports of grinding and manufacturing beef (lower value) for exports of high-quality whole-muscle cuts; offal items such as liver; and value-added cuts such as short plates, short ribs and skirt meat (higher value).

Commonsense policy

The old Irish blessing of "May you live in interesting times" has never been more appropriate when it comes to policy issues affecting the cattle industry. The industry has no choice but to maintain a strong and reasoned voice in the policy debate. Two major topics will be at the forefront of debate in 2008 — energy and water. Never before has it been more important for citizens and lawmakers to carefully consider the unintended consequences of well-intentioned rules and regulations.

While it seemed like a good idea

to many, the decisions in the 1960s and 1970s to limit new water storage projects and to make it more difficult to explore for energy resources, there is no doubt that we are paying the piper for those choices made decades ago. Thomas Jefferson believed that the engaged citizen was the foundation of democracy. The industry must invest significant resources into assuring that agriculture has a place at the decision-making table.

Breakthroughs needed

As the consumer market continues to differentiate, investment in product development and quality enhancement to create value is a requirement if the industry is to maintain a competitive position. The ability of the beef business to add significant value to the chuck and round as a result of the beef checkoff has been a significant contributor to demand growth.

So, would you rather hold a status quo position or make additional investment in research and development (R&D) as a means to stimulate greater demand for beef? The evidence points to the benefits of additional product development expenditures.

The beef recalls in fall 2007 serve as a harsh reminder that the battle to assure food safety is not yet won. The industry's record on food safety during the past several decades has been one of improvement. However, if the industry is to create even better benchmarks for safety, then the industry must invest additional dollars into development of microbial interventions and other food safety technologies.

A return to our core values

Most of all, I hope we would rather find a way to return industry and policy debate into the realm of civility instead of the acrimony and dissonance that has characterized the past several years. It is time to evaluate the very real effects of a house divided as opposed to a house united.

Our industry, our communities and our nation will face very difficult challenges in 2008. Meeting those challenges will require statesmanship, civil debate and visionary leadership. Fortunately, we have a choice — either allow ourselves to slide into weakness resulting from cynicism and reactionary thinking or do the work of building an industry and our nation. What do you prefer?

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- Fee of \$80.00 is enclosed and includes a one year subscription to *Angus Journal*
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The length of the membership name and location must not exceed 40 spaces, for example:

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