

# A Peek At The Future

***Five emerging trends are reshaping how consumers spend their dollars — and that has implications for beef producers and the food industry.***

by

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At first glance, trends happening in New York City — or some other part of the globe — may not seem to have much effect on an Angus producer in Kansas or Colorado. But in reality, those consumers drive the larger economic picture, which influences everything from the vacations they take to the food — including the beef — they buy.

“If you understand what trends are occurring, you can better market your product, win more customers and make more money,” says Daniel Levine, a New York-based international social trends expert. As executive director of the Avant-Guide Institute, Levine leads an international team of more than 9,000 trend spotters who track the latest ideas

and experiences from around the globe.

He explains that social trends are what people are thinking and feeling in all parts of their lives — their behaviors and attitudes toward health, finance, work, leisure, family, community, etc. Levine says the bottomline is this: “People are willing to spend money on things that are important to them.”

What’s important to people in 2011 and beyond? Levine shares the current top five trends and how they correlate to agriculture.

## **Trend 1: Personalization**

“This means people want products and services created just for them,” says Levine.

Examples of personalization include credit cards and stamps to which you can upload your own photo. Mega-shoemaker Nike now offers Nike ID, which allows people to personalize their own tennis shoe online, choosing the color patterns, style and even the embroidered message of their liking.

“People want the opportunity to be unique, and industries who embrace this recognize that they can create more sales,” says Levine.

How is personalization happening in the food realm? Candy maker M&M’s allows customers to go online and

personalize their favorite chocolate-covered candies with messages and even photos. More recently, Heinz ketchup now allows online customers to personalize their own messages on the Heinz label. Some wine and bottled-water companies also allow this form of personalization.

## **Trend 2: Transparency**

“People want information,” says Levine. This is not a new concept to the food industry. Consumer desire to know where their food comes from has been growing for several years.

Now several companies are complying with that request via virtual tours. As examples, Dole® bananas now include a three-digit code on the label that can be entered on the company’s website for information about the farm where the bananas were grown (visit [www.doleorganic.com](http://www.doleorganic.com)). Likewise, FritoLay, the maker of Lays potato chips offers a “chip tracker” feature on its website so consumers can follow the chip production process all the way back to the farm where the potatoes were grown (visit [www.fritolay.com](http://www.fritolay.com)).

“Transparency will raise our games,” says Levine, commenting on these efforts. “Companies have to do it or will be pushed out.”

And that’s not all. As one example of where the transparency trend is going, Levine points to clothing and shoemaker Timberland. It now prints an “ecological footprint” label on its products stating the environmental impact of making the product. It also includes a “community impact” label that reports how the company creates jobs and contributes to the community and economy.

“I think more industries need to put community impact labels on their products so that consumers know when they use those products or services how it is beneficial to others,” states Levine.

## **Trend 3: More mobile**

According to Levine, mobile apps aren’t going away. Thus, he says, no matter what business you are in, make sure your website is useable on mobile devices (see “Next generation customer service”).

And, he says, it’s time to embrace Twitter, Facebook and blogs.

“You need to communicate with your customers in the ways your customers like to communicate,” says Levine. He adds that you also need to monitor these social media formats so that you know what is being said about you — or your industry

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— and you can respond with real-world, factual information.

**Trend 4: Meaningful experiences**

Levine reports that this trend has emerged from the 2008 recession.

“Before the recession people were willingly spending money just to have a

good time; they were less discretionary,” he explains. “Now, people are seeking products and experiences that help others, help the environment and are educational.”

Levine adds, “People want to have experiences where they learn something, and they can share unique experiences with friends and family.”

This trend bodes well for agriculture

and agritourism. Levine says people are very interested in animals and the environment — opportunities to be out in nature, learn where their food comes from and enhance the environment are all experiences that interest them in this new era.

**Trend 5: Green continues to grow**

“We are already in a green decade, and

it’s not going away. Green is the biggest trend for the rest of our careers. People are becoming more eco-conscious and still willing to spend money on things they care about,” says Levine.

Examples include everything from rooftop vegetable gardens and beehives in urban settings to personal wind turbines. On the corporate level, Levine reports that car rentals in Europe now offer car selection by size, price and carbon dioxide emissions — a trend he fully anticipates will come to the United States. As well, some companies are implementing programs to buy carbon credits to offset their emissions.

For the agricultural community, this trend suggests farmers and ranchers need to do a better job communicating their “green” activities, such as preserving open space, reducing erosion, safeguarding the water supply, and sequestering carbon.

All total, Levine concludes that these five trends indicate people are moving away from just spending money.

“Instead, they want to spend money on things that have meaning — friends, family, the environment.” For agriculture, this means to earn consumers’ support, farmers and ranchers will need to continue to tell their story and how their efforts benefit the community and the environment.



### Next-generation customer service

It may sound a bit space age, but food-app technology on mobile phones will soon be the norm, according to Phil Lempert, the “Supermarket Guru.” An in-store scan of the bar code tells you everything you need to know to decide what to buy, and then adds to your list automatically for the next shopping trip.

New technology, he says, will also allow for instant messages (texts) with specials that last for a period of time targeting your likes and dislikes and offering savings. At the checkout, your mobile device can “talk” to the self-checkout, download coupons and frequent shopper bonuses, and deduct the amount from the bill at checkout.

Lempert predicts the next generation of restaurant apps will allow you to pre-order from the restaurant’s menu. As you walk through the entrance, your mobile device will send a message to the kitchen to ‘fire’ up your food and will take into account how long you would like to wait to be served.

**Source:** *Supermarketguru.com*