

# What Are Our Consumers Telling Us?

*The beef industry needs to address the issues consumers care about.*

by **KINDRA GORDON,**  
*field editor*

There are three important T's to consider when the beef industry communicates with consumers, said John Lundeen, senior executive director of market research at the National Cattlemen's Beef Association (NCBA). Those words are technology, trust and transparency. Lundeen shared remarks during the International Livestock Congress (ILC) Jan. 15 in Denver.

He noted that research continues to show that the majority of people love beef. However, we can't ignore that some consumers want to know more about how beef is raised and have concerns, he added.

"We must answer the questions consumers ask," Lundeen said. He pointed out that often we try to assure consumers about their concerns by focusing on science and technology. For example, we convey to consumers that modern farming is critical to feeding the world's growing population, and modern farming is critical to keep food affordable for everyone.

However, that message often doesn't resonate with consumers. Rather, they are concerned about how modern farming practices are affecting their own family's

long-term health and how the animals were treated.

This is where messages that reflect trust and transparency may connect better with consumers. As one example, Lundeen shared data from a project looking at how antibiotic messaging resonated with consumers. When it was explained to consumers that antibiotics were given

to the animal because it was sick or as prescribed by a veterinarian, 52% and 49%, respectively, were comfortable with the use of antibiotics. When it was explained that the antibiotic was used to enhance the safety of the beef consumers eat, 73% were comfortable with its use. Conversely, if the message to consumers was scientific and difficult to understand as

to why the antibiotic was being used with animals, only 17% were comfortable with its use.

"We need to lock onto things that matter to the consumer," Lundeen said. "When we focus our message to consumers on human health and animal well-being — rather than science — we can do a better job of communicating with that consumer."

Additionally, Lundeen shared that Millennials — consumers born between 1980 and 2000 — are a segment of the consumer market that represent an "amazing opportunity" to the U.S. beef industry. He reported that there are 80 million Millennials, which outranks the 78 million Baby Boomers in the country.

Lundeen noted that Millennials are just now finding their niche in life and society and are making food decisions.

"They are at the age where we (beef) want to win with this audience," Lundeen stated. Because Millennials largely turn to the Internet for information, Lundeen noted that social media is key to getting beef's messages about beef safety, nutrition, environmental care and animal welfare to them.



PHOTO BY KASEY MILLER

"We need to lock onto things that matter to the consumer," said NCBA's John Lundeen. "When we focus our message to consumers on human health and animal well-being — rather than science — we can do a better job of communicating with that consumer."

