

# Sustainability

*Industry panel considers what the correct paths are for the beef industry.*

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

“How do you define sustainability?” was the question posed to four panel members during a session at the International Livestock Congress–USA

2013 hosted Jan. 15 in Denver. The panel included Cameron Bruett, chief sustainability officer with Greeley-based meat-packing company JBS Swift;

Cristain Barcan of the world’s largest chemical company, BASF; John Pollak, director of the U.S. Meat Animal Research Center (USMARC) in Clay Center, Neb.; and Kim Stackhouse, director of sustainability research with the National Cattlemen’s Beef Association (NCBA).

JBS’s Bruett said his company views sustainability as representing fundamental values such as treating employees right, stewardship of resources and creating quality products.



PHOTOS BY KASEY MILLER

“People look at sustainability as three buckets (environmental, economic, social),” said Barcan, “but I say, plain and simple, sustainability is ‘How do we fulfill the needs we have today without compromising the future.’”

“It’s the confluence of economic, social and environmental progress,” he said.

Stackhouse concurred, noting that sustainability initially started as concern over greenhouse gases and environmental issues. Today, she said, its definition is more about “balancing



“As a Millennial speaking for my generation, we’re scared,” Stackhouse said. “We have the finite resources and a lot of people to feed.”



From left, John Pollak, USMARC; Cristain Barcan, BASF; Kim Stackhouse, NCBA; and Cameron Bruett, JBS Swift, comprised a panel that looked at beef industry sustainability. The panel concurred that working together will be key to success.

environmental responsibility with economic and social issues, as well.”

Pollak, who was an animal breeder prior to becoming an administrator, said he prefers the more succinct definition of sustainability as “the capacity to endure.”

“People look at sustainability as three buckets (environmental, economic, social),” said BASF’s Barcan, “but I say, plain and simple, sustainability is ‘How do we fulfill the needs we have today without compromising the future.’”

The panel noted that a big concern for the future is the world’s rapidly increasing population and the fact that during the next 40 years the world will need to produce 70% more food.

“As a Millennial speaking for my generation, we’re scared,” Stackhouse said. “We have the finite resources and a lot of people to feed. Everyone — organic, natural, conventional producers — is going to have to work together, and everyone needs to do better [with regard to sustainability].”

Stackhouse emphasized that all sectors within the beef industry will need to explore technologies. As examples, she pointed to continued improvements of precision farming and genomics, and possibly new packing innovations to address efficiency and food waste. “All efficiencies make a difference. We need to realize we have to think bigger and more holistic; it’s not just about efficiency with the cow.”

While there are many issues to address in the industry’s future sustainability, the panel concurred that working together will be key to success.

Bruett concluded, “Let’s be proud of who we are; let’s be proud of what we do. Let’s not let others define us, and let’s feed the world.”



**Editor’s note:** Currently, the beef checkoff has funded the only sustainability project that is focused on addressing both scientific and consumer concerns regarding sustainable food production along all phases of the beef value chain. The first and largest sustainability project of its kind, the present U.S. Beef Sustainability Project will provide key information to continue to improve U.S. beef sustainability, which will be instrumental in the development of critical best management practices that demonstrate the industry’s ability to produce the highest-quality beef in a responsible manner. Findings from the project should be available by summer 2013. Follow this link for more information: [www.beefissuesquarterly.com/meetingthegrowingdemand.aspx](http://www.beefissuesquarterly.com/meetingthegrowingdemand.aspx).