

Movin' Forward

by **BRYCE SCHUMANN**, CEO, American Angus Association

All beef is local

Last month, as I was driving west toward the National Western Stock Show, across Kansas and eastern Colorado, I could not help but think about how few people really live in rural America. And once you enter the outskirts of Denver, and see the vast expanse of lights and traffic, you suddenly realize how many people now live in cities.

Define local

It's no secret that rural America has seen an exodus of people since the dawn of industrialization in the mid-1850s. And you've likely heard the statistics — less than 2% of the population is engaged in production agriculture these days.

Nowhere is this more evident than in the snow-covered wheat fields of eastern Colorado and Kansas.

But unlike other industries, agriculture holds a special place in the hearts and souls of consumers. People care about what they eat. They want to know where it comes from and who produced it.

In recent years, there's been a push by some consumer groups to purchase only locally owned and locally raised food. While I applaud the effort among consumers to reconnect with ranchers and farmers, I'm hesitant as to what the locally raised movement means to the vast number of good people who raise cattle and crops in places like western Kansas.

What makes what they produce any less "locally grown" — and therefore, less desirable — than what someone raises near Denver, for example?

If you're a cattleman on the outskirts of a population hub like Atlanta or a rancher in the Dakotas far from any major urban center, you're producing food for consumers everywhere — whether two or 2,000 miles away.

The reality is, we're all local in an international marketplace where the world seems to shrink in size each day and markets become more accessible to our products in places never imagined just a few years ago.

Real people, real stories

A critical part of our communications effort in the coming years will be to strengthen the ties between Angus producers and the people who purchase our product. The marketing team at Certified Angus Beef LLC is working hard to deliver this message to consumers, to demonstrate to them that it's real people who raise this great product — real people with real stories who live on real ranches and farms.

And, here at the American Angus Association, we are stepping up our efforts to convey that message as well through communications efforts such as the "I Am Angus" program, which airs Feb. 28 on RFD-TV.

In the coming months, it will become even more critical to share the stories of the people who actually derive a living for themselves and their families

through their connection with the Angus breed.

Their story — your story — is one of the most powerful methods we can use

to continue to demand a premium in the marketplace, and high demand from our customers.

