



Movin' Forward

by **BRYCE SCHUMANN**, chief executive officer, American Angus Association

A new reality

The new reality of production agriculture is this: If we want to continue as a viable industry, each of us bears a personal responsibility to share our story with the public. We can't leave this important task up to just our state or national organizations anymore. Instead, all Angus producers must devote a part of their week to telling their story about the importance of farming and ranching to their friends and neighbors, teachers, lenders and other industry leaders.

Who we are

That was one of the main messages that came out of the National Angus Conference & Tour (NAC&T), which took place in early September in Georgia.

Tom Field, executive director of producer education at the National Cattlemen's Beef Association (NCBA), underscored the confusion that consumers often feel when it comes to understanding where their food comes from. Many consumers have become confused about where and how their food was raised and believe that food

production is the bastion of large, anonymous corporate interests.

Not so, according to the checkoff-funded Cattlemen's Stewardship Review, which revealed the following:

- 97% of cow-calf/stocker operations are family-owned.
- 54% have been in the same family for three generations or more.
- 94% of respondents vote (compared to 64% of the general population).
- 47% volunteer with youth organizations.
- 84% contribute to the church of their choice.

Just those five points reveal a great deal about the people involved in producing food. We are family-focused. We are committed to sustainability and longevity. We are actively involved in public policy and civic affairs. We are engaged in developing the next generation. And, we believe in traditional American values.

Direct to the public

Speaker Bruce Vincent, who is a logger from Montana, underscored the importance of individuals taking their message directly to the public. He said the logging industry did not fully comprehend the public pressures and scrutiny it would face in the 1980s, and that misunderstanding ultimately resulted in the demise of a once-vibrant industry.

He said agriculture is now in the cross-hairs, facing the same pressures that logging did 25 years ago, and that its future depends on reaching out and telling a positive story to influence the public's perception of food production.

While I'm limited in this space to discuss in great detail all that Field and Vincent shared with us in Georgia, I want to encourage you to take a look at this website: www.providerpals.com. It's a new program developed by Vincent that helps individual producers like you link up with urban kids and educators.

"Provider Pals exists because of a

number of current realities: In the United States and Canada today there is a large and growing resource linkage problem. Our largely urbanized culture (80% of us now live in urban areas) has lost track of where their stuff comes from," says Vincent. "This disconnection between consumption and production is problematic for all involved in addressing the difficult decisions we face in protecting the natural environment while providing the products society consumes. It is especially problematic for those who live in, work in, love and manage the environment."

Please take a few minutes in the next 30 days to look at this website — and to consider your role in helping advance the interests of our industry.

