

Public Relations

RBCS XXII addresses consumer issues, from steak preferences to regulatory concerns.

Several presentations at this winter's Range Beef Cow Symposium XXII (RBCS) focused on consumer issues — with topics ranging from antibiotic regulations to consumer advocacy. The biennial event was hosted Nov. 29-Dec. 1, 2011, at the Mitchell Events Center, Mitchell, Neb., by the cooperative extension and animal science departments of the University of Nebraska-Lincoln, South Dakota State University, Colorado State University and the University of Wyoming.

In the pages that follow, we share highlights of those presentations, including:

- “Public Issues: A Call to Get Involved,” by Trent Loos;
- “Antibiotics Issue Must Remain Science-based,” by Mike Apley;
- “Source Verification Important to Steak Customers,” by Chris Calkins;
- “Cutting Through the Myths to Feed a Growing Global Population,” by Travis Choat; and
- “Global Beef Market Opportunities,” by Paul Clayton.

Comprehensive coverage of the event is provided online at www.rangebeefcow.com, an event coverage site by Angus Productions Inc. (API), publisher of the *Angus Journal* and the *Angus Beef Bulletin*.

Public Issues: A Call To Get Involved

Well-known agriculture industry advocate Trent Loos helped kick off RBCS Nov. 29. A crowd of more than 500 beef producers and industry representatives was on hand for the three-day event.

Loos encouraged those in the audience to take to the streets and tell ag's story as the industry continues to try bridging the knowledge gap between urban and rural consumers. “99% of people don't have a clue what we do,” he stated.

Loos, who has traveled to 28 states, three Canadian provinces and Queensland, Australia, this past year to advocate for agriculture, emphasized that the battle is no longer about what consumers do not know. Instead, he said, the challenge is that “too much of what they know isn't so.”

“We need reality and practicality to come back into focus,” he said, “and that needs to come from people on the land.”



“Until we learn to share what we are passionate about,” said Trent Loos, “there will be a disconnect with urban consumers.”

Providing examples, Loos mentioned the child labor law that was being proposed. He encouraged the audience members to contact their state legislators before the Dec. 1 comment deadline to let them know how this would adversely affect agriculture.

Loos said that an unfounded regulation such as that is an example of what can come about because people do not understand agriculture.

As other examples, he shared that taxes, regulations and even the current wolf issue in Idaho are other issues that need ag's voice. “Get involved in the process and say, ‘enough already,’” said Loos.

There is a risk to not getting involved and sharing ag's story. Loos pointed to the European Union and Australia as examples of where regulations have led to increased reliance on imported foods and increased food costs.

“Without efficient food production, that's where we are going,” he said.

For those willing to be an advocate for ag, Loos advised, “Stop defending how we take care of animals and start explaining why we care for animals. Share why we use pharmaceuticals and the science behind the practices we use.”

He emphasized the importance of conveying words and messages that the non-ag public can understand — and connect with.

“Think about how you communicate,” Loos advised. “Are people understanding what you say?”

“I take great issue with the term ‘slaughter.’ We don't kill.

We respectfully harvest plants and animals to improve human life,” Loos said. “We — agriculture — are about managing life, controlling the death and improving the cycle of life. That's what we do ... We also care about passing our farming operation to the next generation.

“Until we learn to share what we are passionate about,” he continued, “there will be a disconnect with urban consumers.”

Loos said agriculture must also continue to share its efficiency efforts in terms of “green and sustainability” with consumers.

“Through science and technology from the land-grant university system, all of ag has become more efficient. We should really pitch that as being green,” he said, noting that's what efficiency is, and that's what resonates with consumers.

Looking ahead, Loos said, for 2012 he will continue to be an advocate for agriculture and hopes others will join him in the effort. Loos intends to particularly focus on sharing ag's positive message with the medical community.

“The basic information is not getting out,” he said.

He is especially concerned with the continuing tactics of the Humane Society of the United States (HSUS) to stop animal agriculture. “We have to get active and get them rooted out now,” Loos said.

Loos concluded by asking the audience to share the message that America's farmers and ranchers produce food to feed the world in an efficient manner. “Tell one person a day what we do to improve their lives,” he concluded.

— by Kindra Gordon

Antibiotics Issue Must Remain Science-based

Kansas State University veterinarian and professor Mike Apley urged beef producers to stay vigilant on the issue of restricting use of subtherapeutic antibiotics in food animals.

The Food and Drug Administration (FDA) and the Center for Veterinary Medicine (CVM) have approved antimicrobial use in food animals for increased rate of gain; increased feed efficiency; and disease prevention, control and treatment.

Do these uses in food animals have an effect down the road on

humans? Apley shared that research has shown use of antibiotics in food animals has a very minimal effect on humans. “I assure you, the vast majority of resistance issues are not food animal-related. There can be a small incidence, but it is few and far between,” he stated.

However, a misconception persists among consumers that antibiotics used in livestock make human diseases harder to cure. As a result, the classifications of prevention and treatment — which are considered “subtherapeutic” uses in food animals — are being targeted for restricted use, Apley reported.



The industry must continue to encourage regulators to make science-based decisions in determining allowable uses of antibiotics in food animals, said Mike Apley.

He urged the industry to continue fighting this, saying, “If we lop off the most politically acceptable category to ‘cut down use,’ then we end up with a precedent of the precautionary principle for addressing the much more important and, in my mind, the more likely to have an effect on prevention and control claims.”

Apley said the industry must continue to encourage regulators to do their job and make science-based decisions on this issue.

He shared that Guidance 209 from the FDA/CVM was out for comment. It sets forth two principles:

- Use of medically important antimicrobial drugs in food-producing animals should be limited to those uses that are considered necessary for assuring animal health.
- Use of medically important antimicrobial drugs in food-producing animals should be limited to those uses that include veterinary oversight or consultation.

“It is clear cut that in the future, a veterinarian will need to be involved in antibiotic use actions with livestock,” Apley said.

Also being discussed in the legislature is HR 1549 Preservation of Antimicrobials for Medical Treatment Act, known as the PAMTA bill. It has been in discussion for several years, and would essentially ban the “subtherapeutic” use of seven classes of antimicrobials in food animals. Apley said the bill does not currently have much traction, but it is legislation the industry must continue to monitor.

Going forward, Apley suggested three points the livestock industry must be proactive in sharing with the public:

1) We utilize approved antibiotics in the production of beef cattle to improve efficiency and rate of growth, prevent and control disease, and treat disease.

2) Antibiotics are one of many tools we use to efficiently produce plentiful, safe and nutritious food.

3) These tools should only be taken away based on sound scientific evidence that they cause an unacceptable risk to human health. There are multiple risk assessments out there showing very minimal risk, and the detractors should do their own risk assessments.

— by *Kindra Gordon*

Source Verification Important to Steak Customers

Consumers are more informed about where their food comes from, and a study from the University of Nebraska–Lincoln (UNL), the Nebraska Department of Agriculture, and the University of Adelaide says that they are willing to pay more for a source-verified steak.



“Customers use source verification to indicate other things about that product,” said Chris Calkins, “and that’s where it has its value.”

Chris Calkins, Nebraska beef industry professor at UNL, reported that consumers use source verification as a way to guarantee quality and safety. They like to know where it comes from and how it is produced.

The research team sent an online survey to more than 1,000 participants who had dined at high-end restaurants and had six steak-tasting events in the Southwest and the East Coast.

The taste test offered participants four options of steaks (including farm-verified, state-verified, region-verified

and generic). A different price was randomly assigned to each steak so that price wasn’t the main determining factor.

Participants were asked to write down their reasoning for selecting their steak, and also filled out a brief survey after dining.

The online survey responses indicated most participants dined out two to three times a week (30%) or weekly (28%). The

participants were beef eaters, with the majority consuming beef on a weekly basis in and outside the home. Filet mignon was the most preferred cut at 41%.

An interesting fact was that 41% said that sometimes they seek advice from others when not sure of what to order. Of those, 92% ask their server or a member of the waitstaff. Calkins asserted that this could be an advantage for the beef industry.

“In those high-end restaurants, that waitstaff considers themselves to be professionals; and in my assessment, they were anxious and interested and open to learn about the product they were serving,” said Calkins.

Participants who were uninformed of the origin of their meat mostly assume it

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was from somewhere in the United States (62%). Many (39%) wanted to know the state of origin, and 38% wanted to know the country of origin.

Table 1: Consumers perceive meat with an unspecified origin to come from

• Somewhere outside of the United States	3.24%
• Somewhere within the United States	62.31%
• Regionally or locally raised	3.14%
• Unsure	15.70%
• I do not think about it. I am not really concerned about the origin.	15.60%

“Customers use source verification to indicate other things about that product,” he said, “and that’s where it has its value.”

State-of-origin and farm-of-origin steaks were the most ordered regardless of price — two-thirds preferred steaks with more specific origin. Participants’ perceptions of state-of-origin, Nebraska Source-Verified Beef, were that it was of high-quality, corn/grain-fed, USDA Choice or Prime, flavorful, very tender, from farmers who care about the land and animals, a brand they would trust, lean, high nutritional value and always satisfying.

More than 70% said they would be willing to pay an extra \$8.75 for farm-of-origin steak in high-end restaurants, and an extra \$4.74 for steaks with known state of origin.

— by Kasey Miller

Cutting Through the Myths to Feed a Growing Global Population

Travis Choat of Elanco Animal Health said it is time to end the debate over technology’s role in food production. He shared a forecast by the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) regarding the food needed to nourish a world population expected to reach 9 billion by the middle of this century.

“By the year 2050, we will need 100% more food,” said Choat. “And the FAO says 70% of it must come from efficiency-enhancing technologies. It has to; we don’t have 100% more land to produce that food.”

To illustrate how hunger already is a growing concern, even in industrialized nations, Choat shared data indicating two in five children living in London, England; one in eight children in France; and one in five children in the United States are hungry because of an insecure food supply.

Choat cited data suggesting malnutrition may be the No. 1 health problem in developing nations. The reason may be that adequate food supplies are lacking or that the cost of food is too high. Technology offers solutions for both.

According to Choat, standing in the way is a myth claiming people don’t want modern technologies used in food production. As evidence to the contrary, he cited results of a recent International Consumer Attitudes Study revealing opinions and food-buying behaviors. Involving more than 97,000 consumers in 26 countries, the project looked not only at what people say they want, but how they spend their money.



“By the year 2050, we will need 100% more food, and the FAO says 70% of it must come from efficiency-enhancing technologies. It has to; we don’t have 100% more land to produce that food,” said Travis Choat.

Choat said the results suggest 95% of consumers make food purchase decisions based on taste, cost and nutrition, and in that order. Another 4% of food buyers make choices based on lifestyle. Collectively, explained Choat, they represent a 99% majority that does not base everyday purchase decisions on food safety concerns or political issues like animal rights. They are either neutral or support the use of efficiency-enhancing technologies to grow food. All want to exercise their right to choose.

“The other 1% of food buyers represents the radical fringe driven by emotion and myth. They want to protect us from ourselves and oppose the use of modern technologies to produce food,” said Choat. “But we can learn from the fringe 1%. They do take action.”

Choat urged his audience to be proactive in exposing the myth and telling how technology supports three fundamental rights. The first is the right to food — to not go hungry because food is unavailable. The second right is choice — to be able to choose from a variety of food products. The third right is sustainability — to be “environmentally right” and protect natural resources while producing food for a growing world population.

Choat encouraged beef producers to make it personal and engage key food chain influencers about the need to provide for these rights, through implementation of innovative technologies.

“Morally, scientifically, economically, environmentally and socially, the data support the use of technology,” said Choat. “So support the 99%!”

— by Troy Smith

Global Beef Market Opportunities

“Opportunities are out there in front of you,” Paul Clayton with the U.S. Meat Export Federation (USMEF) told RBCS attendees. Clayton followed that by asking producers to think about beef market globalization.

“In my mind, that is about doing business by trading in the best market you can find,” he said. “In a lot of cases for beef that is outside the U.S.” In 2011 alone, the United States is reporting 19% growth in beef exports.

He pointed to the world’s growing population — projected to grow by 1 billion people during the next 20 years — and the world’s growing economy. Clayton stated, “Countries are going to be growing and growing — and they have the ability to pay for things. There is value in these international markets.”

Clayton said Taiwan, Japan, Korea and the European Union have been our beef export focus in the past. While that will continue, he said Mexico, Russia and China have huge potential because of their populations, increasing gross domestic product (GDP) and friendly trade relations with the United States.

Clayton admitted that the Dec. 2003 incident of bovine spongiform encephalopathy (BSE) in the United States “destroyed” the American beef industry internationally.



Mexico, Russia and China have huge potential because of their populations, increasing gross domestic product and friendly trade relations with the United States, said Paul Clayton.

“We have recovered, and faster than expected,” he stated. “Exports do contribute to higher cattle prices.”

Looking forward to 2012 and 2013, Clayton anticipates continued strong export growth. He said U.S. beef is in demand because it is grain-fed and quality genetics, has a reputation for high food safety standards and offers a consistent supply. He shared that many of the countries the United States competes against for exports provide primarily grass-fed beef, so supply for them is a challenge.

For the future, Clayton anticipates the United States will remain a leading supplier of red meat to the world. But to do so, he emphasized the need for the U.S. industry to continue being proactive on foreign animal disease control, address residue and growth promotant concerns, and be cognizant of foodborne illness risks and animal welfare concerns.

Traceability needs to be considered,

Clayton stressed. “We are behind, and our competitors use it against us.”

While Japan may eventually relax its requirement for beef younger than 20 months of age, Clayton suggested the U.S. industry continue to verify source and age. He explained, “It’s a way for us to diversify even more to add value.”

Regarding access to China, Clayton said he anticipates it could be a couple more years.

“When they do open up, it will be a good market for U.S. beef,” he added.

Lastly, Clayton encouraged American beef producers to continue to market through brands that help “tell a story” about U.S. beef production.

“Foreign consumers love cowboy hats and your horses,” he said. “They love cowboys; they are intrigued by you.”

— by Kindra Gordon

Editor’s Note: To see the PowerPoint that accompanied a speaker’s presentation or to listen to the presentation, visit the newsroom at www.rangebeefcow.com, API’s online meeting coverage site for this event. You can easily access all of API’s meeting coverage and informational sites in the API Virtual Library, located online at www.api-virtuallibrary.com.

