

# Improving Tenderness to Reach More Consumers

*Editor's Note: Bill Travis is a Simbrah seedstock producer from Athens, Texas. He has some interesting ideas he believes could benefit our industry.*



**By Bill Travis** Guest Editorial

**L**et's visit about beef and the beef consumer. The beef industry must produce healthy, enjoyable and cost-efficient beef products for the customer. Consumer tests show that the most important factor is flavor. The primary source of flavor is intramuscular fat, or marbling. An additional factor is juiciness, also created by intramuscular fat.

However, the leading consumer complaint about beef is lack of tenderness. Tenderness has only a 5 percent correlation to intramuscular fat.

Proper production management, along with genetics, are very important to creating a tender carcass. Management systems that improve tenderness include harvesting calves and feeding them at an early age, feedlot climate, type of forage fed, aging the beef carcass after harvest, and electro stimulation.

Basically, connective muscle tissue causes toughness, but management systems may be utilized to weaken the connective tissue. One important management tool is to use photo sensors in the production line. *Beef that is sensed to be tough should never reach the consumer as whole meat cuts.*

## Genetics and tenderness

The seedstock producer is an important element in developing tender beef. Cattle genetics can help determine tenderness. DNA testing of breeding stock has vastly improved in recent years. Thus, seedstock breeders are able to provide tender beef through predictive science.

In addition, seedstock breeders may harvest their steers to obtain quality grades and shear tests to study tenderness. Tenderness is somewhat heritable. So breeders should test, measure and use the genetics with the tenderest beef. They should test, measure, test and use the good ones.

## Reaching more consumers worldwide

Several problems exist in producing quality, tender beef that is acceptable worldwide. About 75 percent of the potential domestic and export markets for U.S. beef either won't consume, or will limit beef consumption due to generally negative analysis/perceptions of growth promotants.

Growth promotants are known to reduce the quality grade for beef and also make beef less tender. Promotants are used to reduce the cost of production and provide a higher percentage of muscle in each carcass. Growth promotants are

efficient, but basically perceived as a detriment to the successful marketing of beef.

Second, USDA, university medical experts and health organizations have stated that red meat contains an unhealthy fat – basically, a 30-year-old message is that beef is unhealthy. Despite the medical factor, the beef industry continues to strive to produce high fat products, while advertising the actual and wonderful benefits of lean beef. USDA has currently approved six cuts as lean and all of these cuts are Select beef – never Choice or Prime.

## A suggested solution

The U.S. beef industry should harvest approximately 25 percent of its production, low to mid-Choice and very tender beef *without* the use growth promotants. This product would be a flavorful domestic and export product. (Congratulations to Nolan Ryan's tender-aged beef and Laura's Lean that address both production management and genetic testing to produce, growth-promotant-free, tender, Select beef).

The beef industry produces a consumer product. Beef improvement should concentrate on additional tenderness and reduced saturated fat for a more healthy meal – thus, an improvement for the consumer. ➤





**The Well**  
**continued from page 25**

you have to speak up and you have to vote. If you don't do these things, you're missing an opportunity," Vincent said.

The second truth is that when people lead, leaders follow. "So stop whining and start leading. Build your case locally. Join your local chambers and motivate the elected leaders to go where you want them to," he said.

Vincent stressed that this process applies to all levels of government, be it

local, county, state or national.

The third truth he gave is that the world is run by those who show up. "We should all be telling our story, daily!" He challenged the audience to set aside an hour a week to promote their cause and tell their story.

"We need to promote and give hope to the next generation and convince them that what we've built and protected will be there for them," Vincent said.

This generation is searching for a new message of hope for their planet, its

animals and environment. According to Vincent, the question isn't, are we going to have industry, but are we going to have American industry?

The answer to this question is up to us. We need to remember what the fight is all about and that what is being argued about isn't in the boardroom, but instead in the living room. It's through this process of involvement, education and advocacy that animal agriculture can avoid becoming the next piñata. ■



The primary suggestion is to concentrate on Brahman-cross livestock. Brahman-cross cattle tend to have less marbling with less tenderness. Eliminating growth promotants from these high heterosis growth cattle should increase quality grade about one-half to two-thirds of a quality grade level. The additional income from improving the quality grade should help offset the opportunity loss of not using growth promotants.

The hot-weather beef producer would furnish the customer higher quality and more tender beef.

Regarding profits, increased demand and the improvement in both quality grade and tenderness should offset the anticipated reduction in carcass growth. And it would provide beef that is acceptable to a new large group of domestic and international consumers.

Implementation of this suggestion still leaves 75 percent of U.S. beef production to benefit from growth promotants. It would still maintain a broad production climate of freedom for producers and consumers.

And more customers could and would enjoy U.S. beef. ■



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