



Continuing the Conversation

During the Hereford Genetic Summit Sept. 4-5, 2014, Hereford breeders were challenged to embrace technology, focus on the customer, and concentrate on feed efficiency and end product merit to help position the breed to gain more commercial market share. We “continue the conversation” in *Hereford World* issues as we discuss with breeders key take-home messages from the conference and as an Association we continue to build a roadmap for improving Herefords’ position in the cattle industry. For a complete summary of the event, visit HerefordGeneticSummit.com or see the October *Hereford World*.

This issue:

Consumer



Building on Beef

Trends show consumers are enjoying beef in new ways.

by *Bridget Beran*

Consumers still love beef, but they are approaching protein in a different way than they did in the past.

Where roasts used to be the staple on every kitchen table, they have moved out of the way, going down 30% in sales, according to Mark Layco, Certified Hereford Beef (CHB®) LLC director of retail marketing, to make room for ground beef and smaller portions of food.

“One of the big changes is the increase in smaller households.

You’ve got a majority of one- and two-person households,” says John Lundeen, National Cattlemen’s Beef Association senior executive director of market research.

“There’s this ongoing need for fast meals. We have one product that’s perfect and that’s ground beef.”

Ground beef makes up 50% of beef consumed in the United States, according to the Beef Check-off. Sales of ground beef were untouched by the recent recession, and ground beef is seen as the value choice in the beef industry.



“You cannot find a more diverse protein option,” says Andrew Brooks, CHB LLC vice president of marketing. “It’s also a very healthy option that can be added to a variety of meal options from burgers to stir-fries. In a day and age when we want healthy, convenient and flavorful, nothing beats some great ground beef.”

Small plates, big taste

Small meals and snacks are on the rise, and producers and packing companies are charged with figuring out how beef fits into the efficient food equation. At CHB LLC, steps are being made to bridge the gap between well-cooked beef and convenience.

“We work with our packing partners to continue to develop and direct the ever-changing marketing trends on new cuts,” says Layco. “This gives the beef industry an opportunity to present something new to the beef consumer base.”

CHB LLC is cooperating with groups called “value-added distributors” or “further processors” to develop convenience items such as precooked brisket, heat-and-eat soups and other dishes. Considering that takeout food has seen an increase of 40% in sales, time is of the essence for consumers.

“It goes with the lifestyle really,” Brooks says. “We have consumers who are as busy as ever and that trend doesn’t look to be slowing down anytime soon. With less time, we want things that take less preparation and our food is no exception. At the same time, we want healthier options to offer our families on a day in and day out basis. Luckily beef is healthy and we’re working on adapting to become even more convenient.”

Lundeen also says that while consumers still love to put a good burger on their tables, they are constantly looking for innovative ways to mix up their everyday meals.

Brooks says, “While consumers still love their ribeyes and strips, anything new gives them the opportunity to venture outside their comfort zone and more and more consumers are trying this.”

Evolution in ethnic food

Also vital to the changing palate of the American consumer are ethnic foods.

“This next generation is one of the biggest, and the range of ethnicity from this age group is the broadest,” Lundeen says. “They’ve grown up with all these cool options for food so we have to fit those kinds of new food ideas.”

Today, 60% of all eating occasions from food service are global cuisines, according to Lundeen and the Beef Check-off. Mexican and Asian cuisines have made a big splash in American dining experiences. Thankfully, beef fits into the ethnic menu seamlessly.

“Beef has a major role in the exploding ethnic meal diversity trend,” Brooks says. “Beef fits into several places as the center of the plate protein option. These trends do really lend themselves to millennial consumers that have a very diverse palate and love to experiment with food.”

Ethnic food is the number-one trend in beef consumption, followed by fusion foods, one-pot meals, meat-with-meat meals and sandwiches.

“Current marketing research has shown an explosion in this arena,” Layco says. “Luckily for us, beef is a huge part of this culture. Creating a “thin-cut” section in retail stores

and complete weekly ad circulars for major retailers proves that this is an up-and-coming trend for people as they make meal choices for their families.”

Fresh comes first

While quality and taste are still holding strong as the most important components for consumers buying beef, knowing the backstory to the beef is becoming increasingly important to them. Consumers want to date their beef before they take it to dinner. They want to know what it ate, where it was from, what breed it was.

“The producer’s role can be very impactful to the promotion of the beef industry as it pertains to the end user,” Layco says. “Following marketing food trends, working with retailers and local beef councils to educate consumers on the benefits of beef, and lastly, and probably most important, creating true beef advocates within their communities.”

How beef is being marketed is under a complete overhaul, with even key buzzwords getting a makeover. Instead of “low-fat” or “healthy” gracing packaging, beef is being topped off with the word “fresh.” A new consumer focus on where food comes from and its freshness has changed the beef-marketing message.

“Our retailers are serving up ‘fresh’ CHB every day and we don’t do a good enough job promoting this as an agricultural industry,” Brooks says. “Fresh is not necessarily just found at a farmers market. Fresh is a key word we should be playing up because consumers understand it. CHB is fresh and can fit into any lifestyle.” **HW**