

## Animal Activism in Our Backyard



Have you ever stopped to think about whether or not you are producing your crops or raising your livestock in the right way? If you have been in business a long time or perhaps even for generations, the reason you are still in business is that you ask that question every day.

You have adopted new technology that made you more productive, you have evaluated the sustainability of your land resource, and you have looked for ways to make your cattle more efficient and more profitable. As a beef producer, you studied genetics and pedigrees, you adopted beef quality assurance measures, and you were genuinely interested in the well-being of your livestock because it meant the difference between feeding your family and remaining in business or not.

This hard work and dedication are driven by a passion for our business and doing things the right way. There are those in this country who want to argue that we are not producing our product in the right way. In fact, they'll argue we're not producing "good food."

Recently, I attended an American Royal board meeting. The business men and women serving on the board are bankers, lawyers, owners and chief

executive officers (CEOs) of major health companies, small independent business owners, and retired CEOs of some of the largest food manufacturers in the country.

Most of them have agriculture or food production and distribution roots. They have a passion for preserving agrarian values, and they annually battle Kansas City politicians for continued support.

At the recent meeting, a handful of businessmen proposed developing a not-for-profit foundation with the mission of developing standards and an educational forum for both livestock producers and farmers that will address the proper production of "good food."

On more than one occasion, I heard the terms "good food" versus "bad food." Hearing the use of these terms was unsettling. I sat quietly listening to the proposal as one of the directors spoke of the "locally born and raised" movement, the natural/organic movement and several concepts that appeared to be rooted back to animal rights organizations' demands on animal handling and care.

My first thought was that some of the radical demands from leftist environmental and animal welfare

groups are beginning to influence our own community leaders. There was a bit of uneasiness about the proposal being discussed, and one of the elder statesmen on the board and a past CEO of former Farmland Industries said, "You know, we need to be very careful that we don't offend our livestock association customers such as the American Hereford, Angus and Charolais Associations as we discuss these guidelines and strategies." He looked straight at me and asked my opinion.

My answer was, "The breeders of cattle that represent all of the beef breeds that participate in the American Royal are some of the most dedicated and hard working people I have ever met in my life. They stay up all night calving heifers, they ritually care for their livestock, sometimes feeding in sub-zero weather, and they slave all summer producing feed to get them through winter. Their practices are profit-driven, which happen to be synonymous with excellent animal welfare. They all believe that they produce a 'good food' product."

I then asked, "What is the difference between "good food" and "bad food," and who gets to define those standards?"

One of the presenters explained that good food is a movement that began in Europe, settled in on the East coast and is migrating across the country. The concept addresses the wholesomeness, freshness and safety of our food supply. A warning flag was raised, and I requested to serve on the committee that's working on the concept.

Again, I ask: Do you believe that you are raising your livestock in the right way? Are you humane with your husbandry practices? Are you conscientious about the end product that will eventually enter the food chain once the animal leaves your place?

We had better be ready to defend our practices or conform to the wishes of others. I'm not convinced that the "others" prescription for "good food" production produces any more wholesome, safe or higher quality food. I'm certain it could raise the cost of food by limiting efficiency. My goal is to get into these discussions and defend many of our practices with sound science. You will likely begin to hear these discussions in your backyard, if you have not already. I recommend you get involved in the debate as well. **HW**