

# Measuring Sustainability

Metrics are being developed for beef industry to self-assess practices.

by **Kindra Gordon**

As the topic of sustainability continues to be discussed within the agricultural industry, the U.S. Roundtable for Sustainable Beef (USRSB) is working to develop metrics to assess sustainable practices within each sector of the beef-value chain.

Ben Weinheimer, vice president of the Texas Cattle Feeders Association and co-chair of the Sustainability Indicators Working Group within the USRSB, underscores that the metrics being identified are meant to be a self-assessment tool for producers, feeders and packers.

While providing an update at the 2017 Cattle Industry Convention and National Cattlemen's Beef Association Trade Show in Nashville, Tenn., this past February, Weinheimer said the USRSB "will not mandate" any protocols across the supply chain.

In developing the metrics, Weinheimer noted that USRSB members have focused on three pillars of sustainability, which include considerations for the environment, economics and social aspects of the business. He said these correlate with planet, profit, people and animals.

Within those parameters, six high priority indicators to measure sustainability by sector were identified and agreed upon by the multi-stakeholder

members of USRSB. These indicators include:

- 1) Animal health and well-being
- 2) Efficiency and yield
- 3) Water resources
- 4) Land resources
- 5) Air and greenhouse gas emissions
- 6) Worker safety and well-being

Based on those six indicators, the USRSB is working to develop metrics that cow-calf producers, feeders and packers can utilize to assess a benchmark for their operations regarding sustainability and implementation of efforts for continuous improvement.

As examples, proposed metrics for cow-calf producers to self-assess within the specific categories include:

- Within the water resources indicator: Is a grazing management plan (or equivalent) being implemented?
- Within the efficiency and yield indicator: Is there a strategy to optimize animal productivity through improved nutrition, reproduction, genetics, technologies and practices?
- Within the animal health and well-being metric: Are Beef Quality Assurance (BQA) principles incorporated

into management of the farm or ranch?

- Within the employee safety and well-being metric: Are stockmanship and safety practices implemented on the farm or ranch?

Similar self-assessment metrics for feedlot and packer entities are also being developed. The sustainability metrics were reviewed and discussed at the general assembly meeting of the USRSB held in July 2017 in Denver.

Weinheimer stated, "We [USRSB] are trying to keep at the forefront that the sustainability effort be reasonable and feasible for cattlemen." He noted that because the USRSB is a global effort, it's metrics also must be flexible enough to be applied country to country.

Weinheimer also explained that producers interested in

having second- and third-party certification or verification claims for marketing have that choice, but no requirement will be dictated in the USRSB metrics.

Once the final metrics are put in place across the industry, the USRSB will aim to provide guidance, resources and tool kits to aid in the implementation of the sustainability metrics being utilized as self-assessment tools within the industry.

Ultimately, the objective of the USRSB is to maintain consumer confidence in beef as a sustainable food through research and benchmark efforts to document – and improve – the sustainability of beef. Learn more about the effort at [USRSB.org](http://USRSB.org). **HW**

