

Stepping into Sustainability, Part I: Why it's Time

While discussions on climate change might be polarizing, start telling the beef industry's sustainability story.

In this column, we discuss a variety of leadership, growth ideas and strategies to develop the next generation of Hereford breeders and enthusiasts. There is one area emerging in agriculture today that, while gaining importance, is still awfully sensitive to discuss — the word “climate.” As cattle producers, we're frequently demonized in pop culture and some political circles because of the methane emissions in cattle. It's a fact, there are emissions. Yet, taking steps to address those while still protecting and advancing our industry can go hand-in-hand. Part of the solution lies in being willing to participate in dialogue about climate.

So, why should there be only one side (real or perceived) to the climate conversation? Why shouldn't beef producers be part of this dialogue, and yet retain the values that we believe in? Honestly, I think it's possible to have both, but it's on us, as cattle producers, to take ownership over this space and tell our story. That's why taking back the word climate from what is often perceived as a one-sided, sometimes political, agenda is so important for those in agriculture, particularly in the livestock business. Can we create a non-partisan dialogue around climate with agriculture being discussed as a solution? It's been a lofty effort, I assure you.

For many, the prevalence of this topic has just been coming at them way too fast, and it feels forced. Yet, at the same time, it has interestingly prompted a lot

of folks in our industry to pause and say, “Hey! Wait a minute! We're already doing a lot of climate-positive work, and we've already initiated a lot of important practice changes that are good for our business and our land.”

That's important awareness — and it needs to be shared. Really, climate and sustainability are just good old-fashioned agriculture advocacy, albeit with a modern twist. Like it — don't like it — but what counts for pro-climate work can be compared to the adage about the tree falling in the forest. If no one is there, does it still make a sound? Yes, of course it does, but since no one heard, evidently, then the big loud crash didn't impact anyone's point of view.

Where to start?

I suggest with sustainability. If the term climate (or certainly climate change) is just too heavy or still too politicized for you, your ranch or your customers, start by stepping into sustainability, something I suspect you already know a thing or two about. In our own Association, we're doing that through research with Colorado State University (CSU).

In a press release last year, Jack Ward, American Hereford Association (AHA) executive vice president, shared: “As individual cattle producers and as the collective beef industry, we will continue to be asked to do more with less, as it relates to environmental and economic sustainability.” He went on to announce a cooperative research agreement with

CSU that, “...leverages decades of American Hereford Association research and data collected by AHA members aimed at characterizing genetics associated with production efficiency, which plays a key role in environmental and economic sustainability.”

There are a variety of sustainability choices you may be able to implement or already have:

- A practice change, such as implementing cover crops
- An energy savings effort or energy efficiency improvement in the form of updated equipment
- A reduction in greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions from an improvement in the process of transport
- Additional use of renewable energy on your farm
- Improving the soil health of the landscape

There really are lots of practical options, so, step into sustainability with what you've already started doing and don't be afraid to discuss it. **HW**

Sarah Beth Aubrey is an entrepreneur and founder of Aubrey Coaching and Training (ACT). She can be reached at sarah@sarahbethaubrey.com.