

Stepping into Sustainability, Part III: Put a Plan in Action

Make sustainable steps that suit your operation.

Since we began talking about sustainability in the July issue, have you considered where your beef operation fits into this conversation? It may help to hear from leaders with whom the American Hereford Association (AHA) partners.

“Sustainability is not a nice-to-have anymore; it’s a need-to-have,” says Kim Stackhouse-Lawson, Ph.D., director of Colorado State University’s (CSU) AgNext, a research collaborative developing sustainable solutions for agriculture. AHA partnered with CSU on a research project in this sustainability space. Stackhouse-Lawson goes on to say, “Yes, producers have been here for generations, but today we have to say, ‘We’ve been here for generations and here’s how we continue to improve and continue to care.’ The proof points in today’s society are expected, whether that is fair or not.”

That’s the real rub that many breeders have with this conversation; they feel forced to brag when they just want to do their work and raise their families. Yet, the “proof society” has become a prevalent issue for businesses of all kinds, including ours.

So, let’s look at a few other steps (*see sidebar*) that you can use to step into sustainability.

It’s about your bandwidth

One reason companies and even farms don’t publish sustainability

It’s about your long-game strategy

Climate challenges will always be part of life. I don’t align with philosophical believers who say we “solve” climate challenges forever. Solutions will continue to change and emerge as does life on earth. So, consider your climate work to be a long game. There may be short-term changes you can implement immediately, but for most organizations stepping into sustainability takes, well, steps.

It’s about your sphere of influence

It doesn’t matter with whom you share your sustainability goals, there will be plenty of people who don’t like them. What matters in this space is the influence your efforts have with the stakeholders that need to hear from you. Consider who needs to be aware of your goals, whom your goals and practice changes affect and why that stakeholder cares. That’s influence where it counts. **HW**

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Five Ways to Step into Sustainability

Whether you have a small show cattle operation or a large cow-calf enterprise, our work in sustainability is noticed by the public. So, if we do want to ensure that at least our neighbors and customers know how we’re achieving sustainable aims, start with these five tips:

- No. 1: It’s about YOUR values**
- No. 2: It’s about YOUR goals**
- No. 3: It’s about YOUR bandwidth**
- No. 4: It’s about YOUR long-game strategy**
- No. 5: It’s about YOUR sphere of influence **HW****

goals or progress is because they don’t have time to implement everything they “should do.” We can often feel societal pressures to be an expert in all areas of sustainability before putting out any statements, but the truth is that isn’t feasible. This area of business is emerging rapidly. Start by looking at your farm’s goals and time horizon for achieving those. Start manageably.

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— Kim Stackhouse-Lawson, Ph.D.,
director of Colorado State University’s AgNext