

Words People Use

Partisanship in sustainability.

Say the word “climate,” and you’ll get very different results, largely depending on to whom you speak. Some folks will assume you’re talking about the type of temperature in an area. *“What’s the climate like in Wyoming this time of year?”* Other people will guess that you’re referencing the comfort of an indoor space. *“How do we keep the climate at 72 degrees in this office?”* Certainly, there are people who think you’re talking about the weather. *“The climate in Indiana is often beautiful with low humidity during June.”* You might even offend some people by simply using the word. Or some may assume they know your voting record because you’ve uttered the word: *“That’s a topic for left-wing people who are of only one political party.”* But you may make fast friends with others and be seen as a better human for saying it: *“If you’re into climate, you must practice sustainability and care about the planet more than other people do.”*

Interestingly, some people quickly indicate they believe climate now is synonymous with “crisis” while others swear that they don’t believe in climate (change, that is), but take offense to being called a “climate change denier.”

Rather than a neutral term, just saying “climate” these days often puts you at risk of immediate categorization by who is listening. Some want to jump into a long conversation about the topic and express their views, while others will look uncomfortable and find any excuse to change the subject or leave the conversation.

All of this over a word that describes the environment that we inhabit.

Getting past politics

The real reason you get so many different reactions (and definitions) about the same word is that it’s become politicized. Frankly, that’s too bad, and it’s not at all helpful. Besides, why should one word be deemed negative or “belonging” to one set of factions when, as you just read, it has many different uses and associations?

In this increasingly political 2024 season, can we even have a non-partisan conversation about climate?

I’m not certain, but what I do know is that it’s crucial for those in the beef industry to reclaim the term “climate” from its commonly perceived one-sided, politically charged agenda. While investigating this issue, it has become clear that many people feel overwhelmed by the frequency with which climate change is discussed, and they believe it is being forced upon them. Nonetheless, the increased attention has prompted individuals in our industries to reflect on their work and recognize that they have already implemented a variety of climate-positive practices that benefit their businesses and land. We need to begin by discussing what we have already accomplished and not be afraid to do so.

To start, focus on sustainability. If the term “climate” (or “climate change”) is still too heavy or politically charged for your family or customers, begin with sustainability, with which you are likely familiar. Sustainability is a significant aspect of the broader climate conversation and encompasses a range of choices that farms and ranches have implemented, such as:

- A practice change, like implementing cover crops or rotational grazing
- An energy savings effort or energy efficiency improvement
- A reduction in greenhouse gas emissions through improving the process of manufacturing or transport or even the diets of beef cows
- Addition of renewable energy
- Enhancing the health of the landscape, including improving the soil or the business’s community or local footprint

So, where does that leave us?

We know engaging in the climate conversation is a critical issue that cannot be ignored by those in agriculture. It is essential to reclaim the word “climate” and create a non-partisan dialogue around this topic. **HW**

Editor’s Note: Readers of *Hereford World* know Sarah Beth Aubrey as the long-time author of ACT’s Playbook. She takes on the rapidly evolving arena of sustainability with this new column. As Aubrey explains, “We’ll cover definitions, concepts and ideas. We’ll explore what’s current and what we in the beef industry have known about sustainability all along. We’ll do a little cussing and discussing, too. Bottom line, we know our business and we know we’re the best at what we do. It’s time to step into sustainability and tell our story.”