

## Young Leaders in Sustainability

Nurturing growth, impact and leadership.

It's obvious to me younger leaders are playing a pivotal role in shaping the future of environmental stewardship and sustainability. For a lot of younger folks sustainability is not just a professional pursuit; it's a powerful opportunity to make a lasting impact on the planet.

Before you get uncomfortable and think this column is headed in a direction you may not want it to go, consider the young leaders in your life. Are they more likely to talk about sustainable practices or raise questions than those of a generation before? Chances are, they are. But in agriculture, we may be offput by that conversation, all the while championing (and rightfully so) that we were the first and longest-standing industry of environmentalists. Today, we can no longer stand on those facts alone. We play a role in global sustainability, and it starts with each operation. Yet, it feels difficult. Why is that?

### Consider culture

Ask people in agriculture what they grow or raise, and they'll answer right away. We're used to identifying ourselves in agriculture by sharing where we live and what we do. But bring up culture in our business or society and you may get some funny looks or even a few cold stares. Yet, culture plays a role in agriculture and is intrinsically woven into our industry's fabric.

In fact, I was referencing some ag culture when I opened this section by noting that we are typically comfortable talking about what we grow or where we live.

Culture exists everywhere, including your farm or ranch business. The definition is simple: culture is a set of norms, habits and social behaviors that are expected. People recognize it, and they make conscious and unconscious decisions because of it. Think of culture like an umbrella, which hovers over lots of behaviors and habits.

### Culture: created or allowed?

Every business has a culture, as does every family. While it's hard to define, culture exists, and it is felt by everyone, even though it's not physically seen. What's most interesting about culture is that it is either created or it's simply tolerated.

Though it may seem uncomfortable talking about sustainability practices, it is really about the sum of the culture around our ranch and farm — our people culture, our community culture, our environmental culture and certainly our profitability culture. There are even benefits to being more open and examining what goes into your business's sustainability culture, and the young leaders around the ranch just might be the best positioned to lead in this area. Here are two examples:

#### Community engagement —

Younger people are adept at using and thriving in online communities, so if you're looking to up your sustainability marketing game, this is the way to do it. It could be on social media, in forums or simply through the design and images you share on your website.

#### Science and research —

Fueling innovation through science and research is a cornerstone of sustainability.

Today's students are making remarkable strides in these fields. From climate science and environmental engineering, to the study of beef diets, today's agricultural careers and degree programs all have a sustainability component.

When we realize that sustainability is simply a sum of all the components of our operation, we can address it and adjust as needed through practice changes and other measures. Then, we realize it's not so politicized after all. And, if you still aren't sure how to talk about it, ask your kids. **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."

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