

## Assessing the Fit

Sorting through sustainability standards that matter to beef producers.

With growing pressure to demonstrate responsible practices, using various sustainability standards and certifications could provide a clearer path for livestock operations looking to enhance their sustainability story. The problem is there are hundreds of programs out there and no real national standard. Still, some organizations are doing their best to create standards that make sense for beef producers. In this month's column, I'll discuss some of these along with some potential reasons why they might be worth your research and consideration.

### Notable livestock sustainability standards

**Global Reporting Initiative (GRI) Standards** provide a framework for sustainability reporting, helping livestock producers measure and disclose their environmental and social impact. GRI Standards are used across multiple industries and are well-recognized by customers in the food world.

#### Sustainability Accounting

**Standards board** sets industry-specific sustainability accounting guidelines that help livestock producers track key issues like emissions, water usage and animal welfare.

**Global Roundtable for Sustainable Beef** established sustainability principles for the beef industry, focusing on land use, emissions, water management and animal welfare.

**U.S. Roundtable for Sustainable Beef (USRSB)** provides voluntary, outcome-based metrics to help beef producers measure their sustainability performance. Covering areas such as resource efficiency, animal well-being and worker safety, these metrics allow

producers to improve sustainability without imposing rigid requirements. As has been noted before, the American Hereford Association is a USRSB member.

**Fair Trade Certified** (livestock products) ensures that livestock products meet high standards for ethical labor practices, environmental protection and sustainable resource use. Certified producers may be able to gain access to unique premium markets and appeal to consumers who prioritize ethical sourcing.

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— Sarah Beth Aubrey

### Why these standards matter

It's important to note that most standards today are not legally required for U.S. livestock producers. Unlike environmental regulations enforced by agencies like the EPA or animal welfare laws overseen by the USDA, these standards are voluntary frameworks.

However, there are reasons you should care about or be interested in some of these programs.

**Market access and consumer demand** – More consumers are looking for sustainably raised meat and dairy, and retailers are responding by

requiring or requesting sustainability certifications from their suppliers. This could help with market access and brand differentiation.

**Regulatory preparedness and risk reduction** – Using standards could align your operation with existing and potential future regulations and reduce legal risks or help avoid environmentally-related penalties.

**Operational efficiency and cost savings** – One of the most important benefits of putting your operation through a standard qualifications program could come in the efficiencies you immediately see, such as optimizing water usage, reducing feed costs and minimizing waste. Over time, these improvements lower operational expenses and enhance overall farm profitability.

**Industry reputation and long-term viability** – Livestock producers who adopt sustainability standards contribute to a positive public perception of the industry. It's really a form of telling our story and then having a third party back up the facts. We know that demonstrating commitment to sustainability builds trust with stakeholders and end-customers.

At this point, sustainability measures and certifications (beyond profitability as a sustainability metric) come down to risk mitigation, operational efficiency and competitive edge. How this factors into your business plan takes time to sort out but may become an important aspect to consider.

Let's continue the conversation. **HW**

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