

## Beef Producers Lead

Sharing the message matters.

Sustainability is no longer a side conversation in the beef industry. It's part of how beef is discussed at the grocery store, in the media and increasingly, in boardrooms and policy circles.

We know that consumers want to know how their food is produced and we've been improving sustainability for decades, long before it became fashionable or political. Now our task is to clearly explain what we are doing, why it works and why it matters for the future of U.S. beef. Doing so helps protect markets, preserve property rights and keep decision-making on the ranch.

While new initiatives continue to emerge, much of what can be done is already underway at your farm or ranch, or could be, and often with little cost or operational inconvenience. Here are five sustainability issues consumers care about and why every Hereford breeder should care, too.

**Efficiency beats ideology** — Consumers hear repeatedly that cattle produce methane. What they rarely hear is that U.S. beef producers have dramatically reduced emissions per pound of beef through better genetics, nutrition, animal health and management. Today's cattle reach market weight faster, convert feed more efficiently and spend fewer days emitting methane than cattle did a generation ago.

Efficiency is the foundation of profitability and sustainability. Every improvement that shortens days on feed or improves gain protects margins and strengthens the industry's defense against regulation. If producers don't tell this story with data and confidence, critics will fill the vacuum with misleading claims.

**Beef cattle production is increasingly more water efficient** — Consumers are concerned about water scarcity, especially in drought-prone regions. What often gets lost in conversation is that most water associated with beef production is rainfall on rangeland that cannot be farmed for crops. Grazing cattle turn grass into high-quality protein while maintaining open landscapes. Modern feedyards also use increasingly efficient water systems and carefully manage runoff and nutrient use.

Water is a pressure point. Local politics can quickly turn water issues into restrictions. Producers who document water stewardship protect their ability to operate, maintain community trust and avoid blanket rules. Even those of us blessed to live in areas with seemingly abundant water should be aware of water-related questions from consumers.

**Grazing keeps grasslands working** — We know that hundreds of millions of acres of U.S. land are unsuitable for row crops and ideal for grazing but realize many urban consumers lump all 'country' or rural areas together. Well-managed cattle grazing maintains grass cover, builds soil health, reduces erosion and lowers wildfire risk. Without cattle, much of this land would degrade or be at risk for urban development.

Land stewardship is risk management. Healthy soils and resilient forage systems mean better drought tolerance, lower input costs and long-term productivity. It never hurts to reinforce what we already know: farmers and ranchers are the country's most effective conservationists.

**Producer-led animal care standards protect the industry** — Consumers expect cattle to be raised humanely, but today they consider old-school 'animal rights' issues as the new sustainability issues. Don't forget to point out how American beef industry animal care standards are developed by producers, veterinarians and animal scientists — not activist organizations — and for essential reasons. Things you can explain include low-stress handling, proper health management and responsible use of animal health tools.

We've seen evidence that unfounded animal welfare concerns are often the fastest route from social pressure to binding laws that do not make sense for cattle or cattle producers. Leading on animal care and demonstrating it helps reduce the risk of ballot initiatives, corporate mandates and regulations written by people with no experience handling cattle.

**Define sustainability before others do** — Consumers and buyers increasingly want proof, not promises. As such, sustainability claims have moved toward measurement and verification in all industries. The American Hereford Association's own push to align metrics and definitions ensures sustainability is grounded in science, practicality and continuous improvement.

Markets reward clarity and consistency. We must own the role of defining sustainability on our terms. **HW**

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