

# Cow Country Reporter



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News from your CEO

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Ten Years! Can you believe it? Cattle Producers of Louisiana has been an organization for 10 years. Hank Schumacher, Ronald Black, Mike Kovac, Dave Sanson and myself met in March 2008 to define the mission and design a structure to operate CPL. We started a newsletter with volunteer help and we hired Encore Visions to build and maintain our website. We have come a long way and thanks to you, our membership, we continue to grow. We celebrated this anniversary at a Region 5 meeting in St. Francisville on May 3.

Old man winter may finally be releasing his grip on our forages, so maybe our summer grasses will respond to sunshine and warmer temperatures. Many of you have talked about lower slaughter cow prices and my first comment is "it is just that time of year", which means school is out and their demand for ground beef will not start until August. The other factor is many producers in the Southeast have run out of hay and their ryegrass

did not produce enough to feed all their cow herd, so they sent some older cows to market. Our auction markets are seeing an increase of new crop calves (unweaned, fleshy, bawling) which lends itself to lower prices. These calves destined for summer grass/backgrounders need more care than our "short" yearlings which are in good demand. The fed cattle market continues to hold its own and currently is \$18.00-\$20.00 cwt. higher than the June live- cattle future market. Feedlots are moving cattle to market. Packers continue to increase their kill as retailers are moving beef. Mother's Day, Memorial Day and Father's Day are certainly controlling factors to this good demand, coupled with warmer weather in the Northeast. Our calf market for July-September may be a little better than early predictions. We will certainly know more in June.

May your grass stay green and abundant and may your calves be heavier at weaning!

*Dave Foster, CEO*

## WHY 'VEGGIE MEAT' WON'T REPLACE BEEF

By Justin Sexten, Ph.D., Certified Angus Beef LLC

Lately the news is overrun with features on how we humans plan to shift away from meat as we've always known it to plant protein alternatives. Personally, I refuse to call it meat; vegetables and legumes in a meat-like form perhaps, but meat it is not.

"Lab meat," despite not being commercially available, continues to garner news coverage with the implication it may be coming soon to a store near you. The troubling aspects of these products are the claims they make against the methods and efficiency we use in raising cattle, and the suggestion that these alternatives are more sustainable than the ruminant model. Recent research offers some compelling arguments that will add to our enjoyment of watching cows and yearlings graze pastures this spring.

At the 2018 Nations Nutrition Conference, Texas A&M University graduate student Jessica Baber presented on evaluating bovine efficiency at converting feed, forage and some human-edible proteins (HEP) to one HEP better known as beef. The work considered all feed sources a beef animal needs from conception to consumption to calculate the return on HEP invested.

Baber's team found differences in conversion efficiency by segment in the beef supply chain. On the farm or ranch, we may think cows less efficient because they spend all their time in maintenance. But considering they convert otherwise indigestible forage into new calves and milk for those calves, the conversion ratio of HEP out from HEP consumed in this stage was reported at 2,871 to 1. As you might expect, the huge factor in this lopsided efficiency ratio for the cow-calf segment derives from the fact that it consumes so little HEP.

Since the stocker segment is also forage focused, the HEP conversion ratio is also favorable, but maintenance requirements for a growing calf coupled with greater feed supplement levels common to the stocker phase reduced that ratio

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## CABBAGE: AGRICULTURE IS BEING LEFT IN THE DIGITAL DUST

to 5.94 to 1. The feedyard is the least efficient in the HEP conversion ratio, generating 0.65 pound of protein (beef) for 1 pound of HEP input, just due to the larger percentage of HEP concentrates used during the finishing phase.

When you look at the entire beef supply chain, the percentage each segment contributes is comparable to the amount of weight gained during the period. The cow-calf segment is responsible for 57 percent of human edible protein (yes, beef) while stocker makes up 10 percent and feedyard is 36 percent of the total.

Overall, the “return on protein invested” is favorable for the beef community, at 1.72 pounds of HEP returned for each pound consumed. Perhaps more importantly, the quality of this protein is enhanced threefold relative to human needs. While we often consider the protein needs of our cow herd, we rarely consider protein needs of the human race. Beef offers a much improved protein and amino acid balance to the human than any one plant or grain input consumed by cattle.

What the Baber study didn't explore was the diversity and satisfaction of flavors associated with beef, but that goes without saying. Not much need to conduct that research in this context—I have yet to meet an omnivore who will argue that the protein found in cattle feed is tastier than beef itself, especially when it's the Certified Angus Beef brand.

So tune out those persistent lab meat feature stories with their wild assumptions. Instead, as you watch the calves turned out this spring to graze forage only a ruminant can digest, remember you are watching the ultimate value addition of turning sunshine and rain into a high-quality and tasty human-edible protein. The next time you hear some herbivore arguing that plants are a more efficient protein source, relax and quote the data. Beef is the product of superior resource efficiency, making use of two-thirds of the U.S. land that is unable to raise crops and improving the protein quality and taste over feed grains. If that data isn't compelling enough, then just offer them a scoop of feed for lunch.

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## ON CHEERIOS, HONEYBEES & CATTLE GRAZING

*Pay attention, Cheerios and Burt's Bees. Could cattle be the secret weapon to promoting a healthy bee habitat?*

By: Amanda Radke

When you've got a house full of toddlers, Cheerios are a popular choice for snacks. I may curse their regular appearance between my couch cushions, on the seats of our vehicles and in every nook and cranny my kids end up in, but they are a quick, easy and popular snack for little kids on the go.

If you've purchased Cheerios in the last year, you may have noticed the company is including “Bee-friendly wildflower mix” with the purchase to help save the bees. The plant packet includes forget-me-nots, wildflowers, orange poppies, coneflowers, asters, corn poppies, coreopsis, blue flax, baby blue-eyes, gilia, indian blanket, tidy tips, sweet alyssum, lavender hyssop, daisies and bergamots.

Despite this noble effort, Cheerios may have missed the mark on finding a flower mix that is appropriate for all climates and all regions of the country.

According to a 2017 article written by Beth Skwarecki for Life Hacker, “Forget-me-nots are banned as a noxious weed in Massachusetts and Connecticut, for example. The California poppy is nice in California, but listed as an ‘invasive exotic pest plant’ in Southeastern states. And many of the flowers on this list are not native to anywhere in the U.S., so they are not necessarily good matches for our local bees.”

However, a follow-up article on the same site points out some additional efforts Cheerios is making to protect bees and the planet. And in 2018, Skwarecki says it's OK to plant this year's variety as it's a single species, Cosmos, which look similar to daisies and are more appropriate for urban gardens across the country.

While agriculture is blamed quite often for a reduced bee population, we can't ignore urban sprawl and the impacts of polished suburban yards interspersed between miles of concrete. An excerpt from the article points this out.

It reads: “But there's more to creating a bee-friendly habitat than just planting flowers. If you spray pesticides on or near the flowers, the bees are once again in danger, so you need to be aware of what you (or your lawn service) is spraying.”

Cheerios is also involved in crop farming and has pledged to promote bee habitats around farmland. According to General Mills, “Last spring, Honey Nut Cheerios announced that by the end of 2020, farms that grow oats for Cheerios will house approximately 3,300 total acres of dedicated pollinator habitat on 60,000 acres of land. Previous pollinator habitat plantings on General Mills' supplier farms indicate that each pollinator habitat is expected to double the amount of bees in the area.”

Burt's Bees is also involved in an initiative to promote bee habitat, and while I think these causes are noble, both Cheerios and Burt's Bees ignore one very important tool that could be used to promote biodiversity of soil, which benefits bees and wildlife.

Any guesses what that secret weapon for success could be?

If you run cattle on pastures, you are already aware that livestock grazing on grasslands is extremely conducive to soil health, plant diversity and wildlife habitat.

This truth was highlighted in National Geographic with an article titled, “Is more cattle grazing the solution to saving our soil?” Written by Maryn McKenna, the article interviews ecologist Allan Savory who notably spoke on a TED Talk describing how cattle can reverse desertification of the soil. And although the article is a few years old, it's once again making the rounds on social media.

Here is an excerpt: “What can we do to increase productivity, make this pasture more diverse, get more species of grasses to return here?” asks Savory. “We can use livestock. Livestock is the most powerful tool we have.”

McKenna writes, “Savory is the originator of a compelling—and in some quarters deeply controversial—theory that argues that everything we know about maintaining natural landscapes is wrong. Instead of fearing overgrazing, and taking livestock off land to rest it, he argues that most grazing lands should have more livestock added, because their movement and their waste and their relentless chomping stimulate grasses to grow. When grasslands restore

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## **ON CHEERIOS, HONEYBEES & CATTLE GRAZING**

themselves, he adds, they sequester carbon; so increasing the density of cattle and other grazing animals not only restores the environment, it protects against climate change.”

While many environmentalists fight to leave federal land untouched, the fact is livestock grazing on grasslands promote the all-important biodiversity of the soil, which helps the bees and ultimately helps our planet.

Let's keep the cattle on the land and recognize their role in this delicate and important natural phenomenon.

*The opinions of Amanda Radke are not necessarily those of beefmagazine.com or Farm Progress.*

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## **TRUMP TARIFFS COULD PUT MONEY IN THE POCKETS OF AMERICA'S FARMERS**

*Fears of retaliation by China are greatly exaggerated and the potential gains far outweigh the possible downside pitfalls*

By: Michael Stumo

President Donald Trump's recently implemented trade strategy — including tariffs on subsidized imports from China — is drawing fire from multinational agribusinesses and their trade associations. They favor a borderless world, and they support the free trade agreements of the past 20 years.

Family farmers and ranchers, however, have a different view. They no longer believe that current free trade agreements will benefit them. Net farm income this year is projected to be the lowest since 2006. The North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) transformed America's agricultural trade surplus with Mexico and Canada into a deficit.

American crop exports are declining as a share of world markets due to subsidized overproduction from other countries. And U.S. livestock producers are now losing market share in their own home market.

America's farmers and ranchers should seek inclusion in Trump's trade strategy, since they confront trade challenges surprisingly similar to those faced by domestic manufacturers.

For example, Trump is using tariffs to target dumping of steel and aluminum in the U.S. market that threatens national security. A key problem is government-owned Chinese companies' overproduction of steel, which has led to global overcapacity. Surging imports have caused U.S. steel production to fall 20 percent over the past decade, with 50,000 steel jobs lost since 2000.

America's cattle and soybean producers face a similar challenge due to Brazil's overproduction of cattle and soybeans, which are subsidized through government programs and directives. The profitability of U.S. cattle and soybean production—and the number of viable farms and ranches—continues to decline in the U.S. as a result. The Trump administration is also targeting Beijing with the planned imposition of \$150 billion in tariffs to combat China's forced technology transfer and the theft of high-tech intellectual property. Instead of changing their behavior, Beijing has announced the intent to impose retaliatory tariffs against some U.S. agricultural products. While media reports cause many to believe U.S. producers would be drastically harmed, a deeper analysis reveals that China holds surprisingly little leverage in most agricultural markets to intimidate America's agricultural producers.

The risk of retaliation in the soybean market has been a news focus. It is true that the U.S. exports more soybeans to China than to any other country. But China's soybean tariff threats have not driven prices down. Instead prices are now higher than before the March tariff threats.

And new markets have been opened for American soybeans, as evidenced by sales of hundreds of thousands of metric tons in April to Argentina and the European Union. The U.S. had not previously sold soybeans to the EU in 15 years.

The corn market has been similarly unaffected. Corn prices are higher than last year and U.S. producers are not dependent on China's purchases. The U.S. sells very little wheat and beef to China, so even less impact is expected in those markets. Pork and sorghum, however, could be impacted, and the administration should make sure that family farm producers are cushioned from any blows that arise from a broader trade effort.

The president has rightfully directed Secretary of Agriculture Sonny Perdue to develop a plan to protect U.S. farmers. And Sen. Chuck Grassley (R-Iowa) has suggested that the Agriculture Department's Commodity Credit Corporation could play a role, too.

It's notable that Brazil and China are becoming larger threats to U.S. farmers and ranchers. Brazilian companies, JBS SA and Marfrig, have purchased dominant pork and beef packers here. A Chinese company bought the largest U.S. pork producer and packer, Smithfield Foods.

Essentially, Brazilian overproduction of soybeans and other agricultural products poses a threat to U.S. agriculture similar in manner to the challenges that China's industrial overcapacity poses for America's steel producers.

Farmers and ranchers will benefit if the administration expands its trade strategy to deal with foreign subsidies and overcapacity, as well as weaponized incoming investment in the nation's agricultural sector.

If Beijing continues this trade conflict by failing to fix its predatory economic strategy, it faces a bigger problem. China has built its economic success on continually selling to the U.S. market—and its manufacturers desperately need access to U.S. consumers.

Tariffs would decrease American purchases of Chinese goods, spurring job growth in domestic manufacturing which will fill the gap. Any subsequent gain in middle class manufacturing jobs would mean more purchasing power for U.S. farm products.

Overall, farmers should stand firm with the president as he tackles these longstanding problems, and demand that they be included in any strategies to address predatory foreign practices. Past administrations helped cause this problem.

The time to act is now in order to preserve a strong economy in 20 years.

Michael Stumo is CEO of the Coalition for a Prosperous America (CPA).

## MYTHS AND FACTS ABOUT WORKING WITH MILLENNIALS: YOU MIGHT BE SURPRISED

*For older ranchers, the millennial generation is a conundrum. But it doesn't have to be that way.*

By: Burt Rutherford

Several years ago, a BEEF survey looked at the challenges and opportunities in finding good help. One of the things that came from the survey was the great disconnect between ranch owners and managers, most of whom are baby boomers, and the millennial generation.

I doubt that situation has changed much in the three years since we did the survey. That's particularly relevant in agriculture, where it's not uncommon to have three generations working side by side.

I had the pleasure of listening to and meeting Alicia Rainwater recently, when she spoke at the Colorado Livestock Association annual meeting. Alicia works for the Center for Generational Kinetics, a group that researches generational differences and works with companies to help managers better understand how to work with the various generations now in the workforce.

She gave a fascinating presentation, which I'll delve into as time goes on. But to start the conversation, she shares five myths and facts about millennials you might find useful:

1. Myth: Generations are about dividing people into boxes.

Truth: That myth is absolutely wrong! Generations are about bringing people together. Understanding the hidden drivers behind each generations' motivations and actions, helps you better understand, value, appreciate, influence and connect with each generation—including those younger and older. Generations actually add to your uniqueness!

2. Myth: Every millennial acts entitled.

Truth: While some millennials definitely act entitled, there are tens of millions of hard-working millennials. The Center defines millennials as those born between 1977 and 1995. In fact, millennials who do not act entitled are actually the generation most offended by millennials who do act entitled!

Read: 9 strategies to manage a millennial workforce

3. Myth: Millennials can't follow instruction (ex. dressing business casual).

Truth: The language of business varies by generation, gender, and geography. If you want to communicate clearly across generations, simply show an example or two.

For example, filming a quick video that shows exactly what you want works best across every generation, will save you hours of training, and makes it easier for you to hold others accountable.

4. Myth: Gen Z (born from 1996 and earlier) is growing up and will be just like millennials.

Truth: Actually, from our national and international research, we are finding that Gen Z is very different than millennials. In fact, we predict that a portion of Gen Z may leapfrog millennials in the workforce! You can learn more about Gen Z in our national study by clicking here.

5. Myth: Companies don't need millennial or Gen Z talent.

Truth: Right now, millennials are the largest generation in the workforce. And Gen Z is coming up fast behind them. The bigger truth is that organizations need every single generation, because generational differences add to diversity of thought that drives innovation!

I would add one more myth to her list, which she busted during her presentation. We tend to think of millennials as young, and some still are. But the upper end of the millennial generation is approaching 40 years old.

The bottom line is this: finding good help for ranch work is hard, and millennial and Gen Z are not just the workforce of the present, but the workforce of the future. Us old dogs will have to find a way to work with the young pups.

There is no other option.

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