

U.S. Beef Month To Spur Export Demand

MEXICO CITY, Mexico — Traditionally a slow period for beef sales, the American beef industry is pulling out the stops this month in Mexico to stimulate demand for high-quality U.S. beef. In fact, the U.S. has joined with Mexican industry leaders to proclaim that the month of May is "U.S. Beef Month."

To kick off the nationwide campaign, cattle producer and U.S. Meat Export Federation Chairman Jim Mullins recently welcomed more than 300 Mexican meat industry leaders at a special recognition ceremony in Mexico City. Most of those in attendance will take part in a promotional campaign involving no less than 100 restaurant and 200 supermarket promotions featuring U.S. beef during the month of May.

"This is entirely a cooperative effort," said Mullins. "And with

Science Awareness Dispels Misinformation

UNIVERSITY PARK (Centre Co.) — One day the papers say decaffeinated coffee is OK, the next day the television news says it is bad. One week oat bran cuts cholesterol, the next week it does not. So what do all these conflicting reports about health and nutrition mean?

Awareness about scientific studies can help people understand why research results may seem contradictory or vague, said a nutritionist in Penn State's College of Agricultural Sciences.

"Most occurrences in the biological sciences are not easily explained," said Dr. Madeleine Sigman-Grant, assistant professor of food science. "Scientists must analyze and interpret the data they gather and ask themselves what the results mean. What is the significance and who is affected?"

To be useful, results must be interpreted carefully. "Researchers are very cautious about drawing conclusions, and they try to present results and interpretations in carefully worded reports," Sigman-Grant said. "But scientists may differ about what a set of data indicates."

The media use scientific reports, along with interviews, press releases, and comments from other scientists, to compile stories. Unfortunately, journalists, consumer activists, and even scientists themselves may apply results in ways not supported by the original study.

"The popular press may imply that a study's results are final, that we have all the answers," Sigman-Grant said. "When a later report contradicts that story, it's easy to become confused about what all these studies really add up to."

People can jump to mistaken conclusions when reading articles citing scientific reports. "Subtle word differences can dramatically change a story's meaning," said Sigman-Grant. "If a study finds that a behavior 'contributes' to disease risk, it does not mean the behavior causes the disease. If a scientist finds that a food 'reduces the risk' of a disease, it does not mean this food prevents that illness."

"No single study is going to give us a conclusive answer about health and nutrition issues," said Sigman-Grant. "When the media report on new research results, neither scientists nor the public should assume the results are conclusive."

Research begins with a preconceived notion, or hypothesis, about possible outcomes. "However, investigators must keep in mind other factors that might also explain their results," Sigman-Grant said. "If they don't explore other possible explanations, their report may be more open to misinterpretation. This could lead to public misconceptions and could damage the researchers' credibility."

If you are concerned about a science-based story in the popular media, Sigman-Grant suggests getting as much information as you can about it. "Read about the research in several different publications to get a variety of interpretations," she said. "You may find the scientist's original report or journal article in the library. Referring to a reputable source of information can help demystify scientific reports."

the passage of NAFTA, the timing and marketing environment is just right. Since NAFTA, our beef exports to Mexico are up significantly, and will continue to rise throughout the year."

On January 1, 1994, the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) eliminated import tariffs of 15 and 20 percent on U.S. beef sales to Mexico. The latest USDA report shows U.S. beef exports up 28 percent in volume and 43 percent in value since NAFTA went into effect.

Mullins explained that the U.S. beef industry's extensive promo-

tional and market development effort in May is expected "to carry us through the summer and into September, which is a very festive month in Mexico. We're reaching out to virtually every sector in the Mexican market — importers, retailers, hotels, restaurants, and consumers."

In addition to the supermarket and restaurant promotions, the campaign includes consumer advertising, a national cooking contest with professional chefs, a special culinary school focusing on cooking with high-quality U.S. beef, and a national trade sym-

posium in Mexico City to discuss trade issues and factors affecting future sales of U.S. beef.

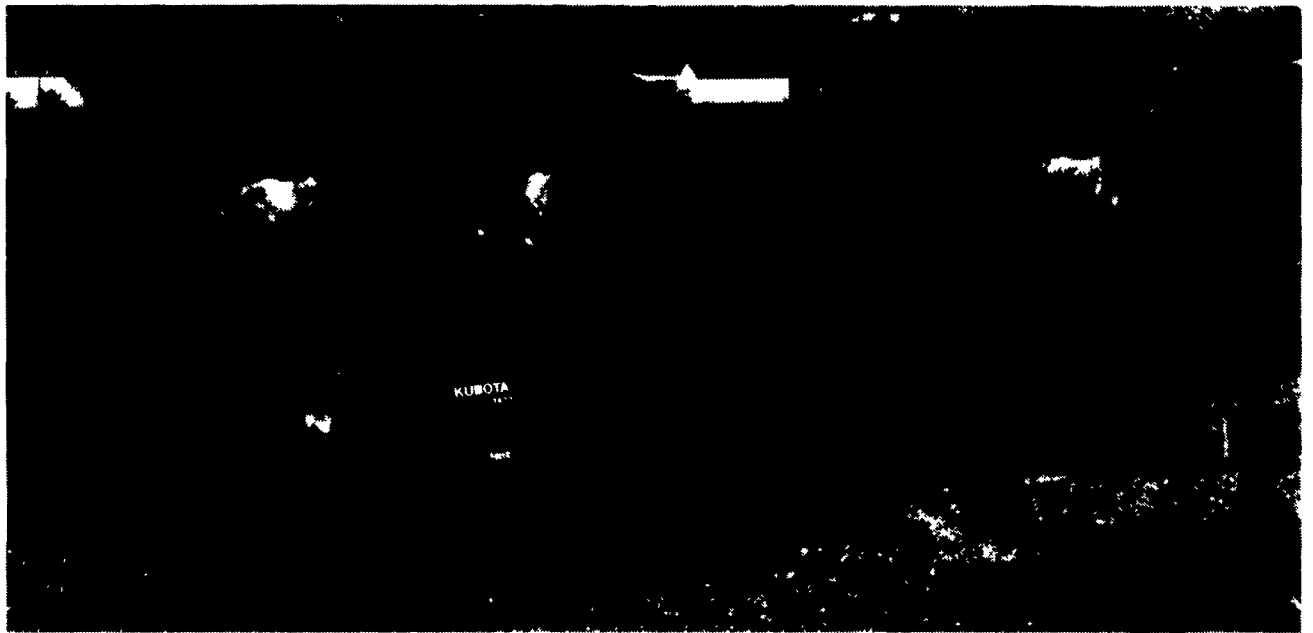
"Much of the month-long campaign is funded with producer checkoff dollars," said Mullins. "With beef production on the rise and fed cattle prices slipping back home, it's a good feeling to be involved in something that you know will increase demand for our product and help support cattle prices at the gate."

In 1993, Mexico purchased 80,314 metric tons of U.S. beef and beef variety meats, making Mexico the third largest export

customer for the American beef industry. In 1994, the U.S. Meat Export Federation forecasts export volume of U.S. beef and beef variety meats to Mexico will be 93,938 metric tons, with a value of \$198.9 million.

Joining Mullins in the ceremony were Harlan Huffman, chairman of the Texas Beef Council; Clark Willingham, first vice president of the National Cattlemen's Association; Philip M. Seng, USMEF president and CEO; and Homero Recio, USMEF vice president-Latin America and the Caribbean.

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