

PENNSTATE



College of Agricultural Sciences

From the Department of Dairy and Animal Science

This regular column from Penn State's Department of Dairy and Animal Science features the research findings, student opportunities, and reports on other important topics generated in the Department. The back issues of the column are archived on Lancaster Farming's Internet www.lancasterfarming.com home page. Look for them.

Dr. John Comerford Associate Professor Dairy and Animal Science

If an American consumer is considering buying a new car and he or she is considering Ford, Chevrolet, or Mercedes, most consumers would perceive there is

one that is different among the three.

What makes it different? In this case there is a perception there is a difference in quality and workmanship, esteem of ownership, and/or length of service. Most consumers would also recognize those qualities come at a higher price.

A former colleague once told me that people do not eat beef because they think it is cheaper or nutritionally better for them - they eat beef because they like it. For that reason, some consumers would fit beef with the Mercedes when it is compared to other protein foods. However, the expectation of a higher quality eating experience with beef has diminished for many consumers.

One reason for the lowered expectation for beef is that the eating patterns of consumers have changed. A large percentage of all meals are eaten outside the home. Twenty-five percent of all breakfasts are eaten in the car. Nearly half of all consumers do not know what they will prepare for an evening meal one hour before the meal.

How does the preparation of a chuck roast fit the needs of these

consumers? Obviously, it doesn't. Because the poultry industry has led the way in the development of foods that meet the needs of these consumers, poultry consumption has increased dramatically.

Another reason is consistency of quality of beef. One boneless chicken breast will look and taste pretty much the same as any other chicken breast. Unfortunately, the variation in the taste, tenderness, and eating quality of beef products presents a major challenge. Unlike an integrated production, nutrition, and genetic system like the poultry industry, the beef business has traditionally been a segmented system across many environments and types of management.

The development of beef production alliances has sought to address these issues. There are now

at least 30 of these organizations currently in place in addition to dozens less structured and organized programs. They represent from hundreds of producers and tens of thousands of cattle to one or two seedstock herds and a few commercial producers.

Production alliances are found around the world. Several exist in the United Kingdom, and they were founded for the purpose of alleviating consumer fears about BSE. Most of the larger alliances are seeking to breed, feed, market, and handle beef with consistent methods. Standards are set for sires that are used in cow herds based on Expected Progeny Differences (predicted genetic values) for traits that are deemed most appropriate for the alliance.

For example, this may include using only bulls that are expected to produce calves with higher-than-average marbling in the meat, or use bulls that originate from the same seedstock herd to reduce variability. Calves are often pooled across many herds in these alliances and fed in the same feedlot using similar rations and management until slaughter.

Post-slaughter standards for handling the product may then be set for procedures such as aging or electrostimulation of the carcass - both of which have been proven to increase tenderness. Finally, the product may then be marketed under a label unique to the alliance to develop consumer recognition and acceptance.

Other alliances, and those currently having the greatest success, may be breed-specific. Several cattle breeds are involved in setting standards for carcass quality and grade and authentication of the breed of the animal. The Certified Angus Beef program is one such alliance, and has enjoyed the greatest success in developing consumer awareness and loyalty to their product. Other alliances exist for the production of natural beef, high-lean beef, or beef produced in a particular state or region.

Certified Angus Beef and other types of beef produced in a national alliance are available in most parts of Pennsylvania. There is currently a model for a Pennsylvania-specific beef production alliance being tested. Sponsored by the Pennsylvania Farmers Union, the Certified Keystone Beef program is being tested in three restaurants in western Pennsylvania.

In addition to specific, consistent standards of production being employed in the production of this beef, this group is marketing the concept of locally produced beef. The restaurant clients are being encouraged to associate the good eating experience of Keystone Beef with the fact that it was raised by their neighbor.

What impact has alliances made on the beef industry? It is probably too early to tell. There are, and will continue to be, bumps and detours on the learning curve for the beef industry. However, it is, and will remain, essential that the beef industry be dedicated to consumer needs and desires.

This implies not only flexibility of products that are available, but a higher level of consistency of production and product quality. Production alliances should be able to meet those needs, and provide consumers with a great eating experience, every time.

Beef Marketing Alliances

And we can prove it.

Here are the facts. Over the past six years, Frontier® herbicide has outperformed Dual® brand herbicides, no matter what the weather. Through wet years, dry years and in-between years.

Here's why. The unique chemistry of Frontier helps it stay in the weed zone when it's wet. And it activates with less moisture when it's dry.

What's in it for you? Consistent grass control in corn or beans. In any weather. When you need real muscle to control grasses you can do better than Dual.

With Frontier.



Agricultural Products

BASF

Always read and follow label directions.
Frontier is a registered trademark of BASF Corporation.
Dual is a registered trademark of Novartis, Ag.
All rights reserved. ©1999 BASF Corporation. NVA-99-1-06-0002

©1999 King Features Syndicate, Inc.
™The Hearst Corporation