



The VIEW FROM HERE

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I'm certain each of you reacted differently to the latest beef recall. In case you haven't heard, when it was all said and done, Topps Meat Company recalled 21.7 million pounds of frozen ground beef, making it the fifth largest recall in the history of the United States. Who knows what the ultimate ramifications will be to the beef industry, but Topps Meat Company, the largest U.S. manufacturer of frozen hamburgers, was forced to close its doors after 67 years in business.

Given the rising costs of production, the never-ending struggles with mother nature and a host of other challenges faced by North American beef producers, I'm guessing most of you didn't spend much time worrying about the recall and what it means to your business. After all, most of you sell bulls to commercial customers and females to fellow seedstock producers, so you are a long way from the end consumer. It's the feedlots, packers, restaurants and grocery stores problem to worry about, right?

My answer to that is, sort of.

It's true, most seedstock producers and commercial cattlemen have very little control of their product once it leaves their premises, so spending a lot of time worrying about combating food-borne illness is probably not a good use of time, energy and resources. The exceptions would be those of you who sell at farmer's markets, have a locker beef business, etc.

The lesson for us to learn from this latest episode is that a.) consumers are more concerned than ever about the safety of their food supply; and b.) most of the buying public's decisions are based upon perceptions rather than reality.

The fact of the matter is, 21.7 million pounds isn't that much beef in the grand scheme of things (we produced nearly 25 billion pounds of beef in 2006), not all 21.7 million pounds was tainted with E. coli, and the U.S. beef supply is still the among the safest in the world.

Unfortunately, that last paragraph doesn't mean much to the average consumer. All many of them know is that every few years, tainted beef must be pulled from the shelves because it is making people sick.

Again, I realize, as individuals, there isn't much we can do to change the public's perception. However, as the old saying goes, "There is strength in numbers."

Most, if not all of you, are already helping shape public perception through the Beef Checkoff. However, I encourage each and every one of you to step up your efforts. Changing perception is as much an educational process as anything, but to educate someone else, you first must educate yourself with the facts. Most times, vague generalizations do little to sway the opinion of a strong-minded person.

The same can be said for promoting the positive aspects of the Limousin breed. If we each do a little, it will amount to a lot of positive publicity for Limousin. And that has the potential to have a substantial impact on your bottom line.

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