

Q & A - Marketing of Non-Conventional Beef Products

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Issue:

A number of recent marketing campaigns have been introduced that seek to differentiate food products by linking them to specific values or production attributes. Some of them are focused on Canada's beef industry and others on animal agriculture in general. The Canadian beef industry appreciates efforts to connect consumers to farmers and farming practices, provided such marketing campaigns do not inadvertently misinform the consumer and potentially negatively impact consumer perceptions or confidence in Canadian beef.

Is the beef industry concerned about the production and marketing of non-conventional beef products?

The Canadian beef industry uses many different production systems to produce a wide range of beef products to meet consumer demand. These systems often use unique or specialized processes in order to differentiate themselves in the market place. Examples would be breed specific programs, regional-based programs, certified organic programs, ritual slaughter programs, etc. The beef industry at large supports these multiple production approaches as ways to create additional value for the industry. Where industry concerns arise is when these various production systems are marketed as being superior against conventionally produced beef – especially when those claims are not substantiated by legitimate research. Sometimes these claims of superiority are in the areas of quality, food safety, environmental sustainability, or animal welfare.

Are there production systems that are better or superior to conventional production systems?

Cattle producers choose production methods that make sense for their operation based on environmental, farm management and marketing considerations. Because of this wide diversity of operational and management considerations, there is more than one 'right way' to raise cattle. Provincial and Federal laws protect the natural environment and support the safety and wholesomeness of Canadian beef. As well, all beef produced in federally inspected processing plants in Canada is subject to the same rigorous high standards for quality and food safety. Consumers can be confident that when they purchase Canadian beef, they are buying the finest beef available.

What are growth promotants and why are they used?

Hormonal growth promotants are used to improve an animal's ability to use nutrients efficiently. Livestock producers use hormonal growth promotants because they:

- increase lean beef and decrease fat content,
- increase feed efficiency, thereby allowing more growth with less feed, and
- help make beef more affordable for consumers and keep agricultural production in Canada competitive with other nations.

Are growth promotants safe?

The safety of growth promoting hormones has been extensively reviewed by many government regulatory authorities and international agencies including Health Canada and the U.S. Food and Drug Administration, as well as by expert committees of the United Nations World Health Organization, World Trade Organization and the Food and Agricultural Organization. In all cases, the evaluation process has concluded that the use of growth promoting hormones, in accordance with Canadian practice, can be used safely in agricultural production. Many foods contain hormones naturally, whether they are from

plant or animal origin. Hormones occur naturally in all animals. Various studies have shown that the amount of hormone in meat is extremely small, regardless of whether or not the animal was treated with growth promoting hormones. In fact, the amount of hormone in a serving of meat from a treated animal is virtually indistinguishable from the amount of hormone in a serving from an untreated animal. The use of all veterinary drugs in Canada, whether in food producing or companion animals, is strictly regulated by the Veterinary Drug Directorate of Health Canada. Drugs, such as the growth promoting hormones and antibiotics used in food producing animals, must meet stringent safety requirements in order to demonstrate that they can be used safely and that their use will not pose a risk to consumers of the food commodity.

Is the beef industry committed to animal care?

Canada's cattle producers work hard to care for their animals every day. It is in their best interest to ensure their cattle are healthy, safe and well-managed. Canada's cattle industry adheres to science-based global guidelines and standards for its cattle production practices. Animal care and welfare guidelines are science-informed, with the updated Code of Practice for the Care and Handling of Beef Cattle providing guidance in these important areas. Canada's beef producers were the first to develop a Code of Practice for beef cattle in the 1990's and it was updated again and released this year following a rigorous three-year review process.

Are cattle producers committed to environmental sustainability?

Canadian cattle producers pride themselves in being environmental stewards of the land while producing a high-quality, safe food. They utilize management practices that protect water sources and work towards the maintenance of a sustainable agro-ecosystem. By properly managing grazing, they maintain biodiversity and wildlife habitat and prevent erosion. In Canada, nearly one third of our agricultural land is unsuitable for crops, but is suitable for grasses which are used to raise grazing livestock and support wildlife. This more than doubles the land area that can be used to produce food in Canada. Environmental management improvements achieved by the beef industry between 1977 and 2007 means that modern beef production uses 33 per cent less land, 12 per cent less water, 19 per cent less feed and nine per cent less fossil fuel energy than equivalent beef production in 1977. The CCA is a member of the Global Roundtable for Sustainable Beef (GRSB) and this year initiated the Canadian Roundtable for Sustainable Beef (CRSB). The mission of the CRSB is to be a global leader in the continuous improvement and sustainability of the beef value chain through science, multi-stakeholder engagement, communication and collaboration. Both the GRSB and the CRSB are working to define the criteria around sustainable beef as well as setting short and long-term goals for the Canadian beef industry in this area.

How should consumers make their beef purchase decisions?

Canada's beef producers are proud of all the choices Canadians have when it comes to beef purchases. We hope consumers will use all the resources available to make sure they get real value from their purchases. No matter the product brand or method of production, when consumers buy Canadian beef they can be confident they are buying the finest beef available. Anyone interested in knowing more about the beef cattle industry are encouraged to contact Canada Beef Inc. or the CCA.