

# It's Time for the Beef Industry to go on the Offense!

H. Russell Cross

Department of Animal Science

Texas A&M University

The beef industry provides a very nutritious product that supplies essential nutrients in a daily diet. Unfortunately, the beef industry is losing the “information” war because they continue to be on the defense. It is time for the beef industry, working with universities, and various NGO’s to come together to develop and implement an aggressive plan to effectively deliver the message. Time to go on the offense! A well thought out “Plan” will need to be developed. What follows is one approach for developing a plan for going on the offense. This plan should include the identification of:

- Essential nutrients that are readily provided by animal source foods (meat, poultry, dairy, eggs, & fish) in the human diet are critically important for growth, development, and good health. Despite their value in the diet, many health-care professionals, policy makers and consumers, have a negative perception of such foods as part of a “healthy lifestyle.”
- Compare beef vs. cell based and plant based products.
- Professionals across a range of disciplines believe that consumer understanding is often driven by marketing rather than science, and the producers of these food products are losing ground each year. Many reasons can contribute to the present situation, in which consumers overlook the value of nutrient-rich foods, but the current plan for delivering science-based nutritional information is not working.

## Assumptions:

- Whatever the proper role of animal products in the diet might be, it must be supported by strong scientific evidence.
- A strategy for effectively delivering accurate, science-based, nutritional information must be devised. Past case-controlled experimental research has not provided all the answers, but the role of protein, certain fats, and

essential nutrients, in addition to plant-based foods, has been well-established in the scientific literature.

- The plan for delivering accurate information must include distribution to all levels (secondary schools, universities, health professionals, policy makers, general public).
- The “deliverers” of this information will most likely not be the producers of the food products. The communication strategy will most likely be developed by a key consortium of universities, associations, and key government agencies who are committed to providing this information in an accurate, science-based manner. Delivery of information will proceed from this newly organized group.
- The cost of delivering this information over a significant period of time could be shared by state and federal agencies and the producers of food (animal, plant, etc.).

### **Potential Plan Outline**

- In order to better deliver the concept that foods of animal origin, along with other foods, do have a valuable place in the human diet, and stop repeating approaches that do not effectively inform consumers about nutrition, a series of steps could be considered:
  - An Association, Company or group of universities could take the lead to form a team to design the framework or model for an “Effective Nutrition Communication Plan.” The goal is to develop and structure a model for a plan to effectively “communicate nutrition and the role of animal products in a healthy diet”! First steps could include:
    - The development of a small internal Task Force to:
      - Finalize the Goals and Mission of the Nutrition Communication Plan.
      - Outline the framework for:
        - The multi-institutional team members who will help design the plan with acknowledgement that this is a BIG, LONG-RANGE project. “THE PLAN” will be ambitious and far-reaching. Delivery will be multifaceted and will have to be accomplished in stages, from small to big. Target

groups will require age and demographic appropriate approaches.

- The structure for the development of the information that will be delivered at each level.
- The structure for the “delivery” of the science-based information at all levels.
- Potential source of funds to accomplish the mission and goals of the Nutrition Communication Plan over the next five years.

**Final Product:** the result of this activity will be a “model nutrition communication plan” that could be used in a regional or statewide test before being expanded to multiple states. This “model plan” could also be used to seek funding for launching the “Nutrition Communication Plan.” As we know, it is a very sophisticated world out there in terms of really changing people’s minds.

In summary, the first step for the beef industry is to agree that this is a very high priority and the second step is to develop (not implement) the design and framework for the Nutrition Communication Plan. The industry associations cannot do it all, nor can the check-off cover all of the costs. This will be a major effort and will take time and resources to be effective.

**The time for action is now!**