

New Demands on Beef Products

*Presenter: Jim Coakley, Coleman Natural Beef, Sterling, Colo.
11 a.m. session, Tuesday, Dec. 6, 2005*

RAPID CITY, S.D. (Dec. 6, 2005) — During the 2005 Range Beef Cow Symposium, Jim Coakley of Coleman Natural Beef provided a packer's perspective on challenges and changes within the natural beef industry. Giving an overview of Coleman Natural Beef as a company and its practices, Coakley emphasized the importance of having a plan to deal with future challenges, not just sticking with a wait-and-see mentality. "Let's make sure that we have a road map set out for ourselves," he said.

Much of the natural foods industry depends on the ultimate customer, the consumer. Coakley noted that Coleman focuses on making its customers — the retailers — happy. At the same time, retailers focus on finding out what their own customers — the consumers — want. The idea of natural or organic beef, he explained, is that it makes consumers feel the product is safe, and that the animals were treated humanely.

Everyone down the line, from the producer to the packer to the retailer, is trying to separate themselves from the competition, Coleman explained. Niches such as natural or organic products can fulfill that need, but each competitor must distinguish itself from the others.

"What happens to something when it loses its distinction? It loses its value," Coakley stated.

Coakley repeatedly stressed the importance of keeping records and documenting treatment and age.

"When you doctor one in the natural program, you lost it," he said. To prevent those losses, instituting a good vaccination plan and keeping track of treatment can be a huge advantage to a producer. And, as export markets begin to reopen to U.S. beef, he noted that keeping records of animal age can prevent problems caused by sometimes-unreliable dentition methods.

The bottom line, Coakley emphasized, is that documentation both saves and makes money. "All that stuff goes back to money in your pocket," he said.

He closed by reviewing the growing trend of third-party audits by retailers — of both the



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(PHOTO BY LYNN GORDON)

producer and the packer. From humane treatment to animal nutrition, he said it's all crucial. Having a "story" behind your operation can be the key to success. "People endorse what you do by buying what you raise," Coakley noted.

— by Brooke Byrd, assistant editor, Angus Productions Inc.
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