University of Idaho and Idaho Beef Council partner to increase beef quality

The Situation
Consumers expect consistent, high-quality beef with every purchase. Therefore, it is essential that Idaho beef producers understand how livestock management practices affect beef quality. This includes youth producers who are raising beef animals as members in 4-H and FFA.

Some of the key themes found in the 2005 National Beef Quality Audit included the need for more producer education; the excessive size, excessive fat, and insufficient marbling in cattle; the segmented beef chain and its disconnection from consumers; the product delivered to the consumer is beef taste (flavor and tenderness); the keys to retail merchandising of beef are color and appearance; and the need for balance between production goals and end-product goals.

Addressing these points in youth education aids in supporting a solid foundation as they become involved in the beef industry. It is important for youth to recognize the impact they have on consumer demand, and ultimately the industry. Every management decision, from selecting and feeding cattle to implementing new technologies, affects not only profitability, but also beef quality. Youth need to be exposed to available resources and tools and understand how to incorporate them into an operation in a way that provides maximum benefit.

Our Response
University of Idaho Extension Educators, Sarah Baker of Custer County and Tianna Fife of Twin Falls County, submitted a proposal to the Idaho Beef Council for producer education of end-product quality. A component of the funding was for conducting Beef Camp, a youth education day. We held the 2010 Beef Camp in Shoshone and invited all youth in the Magic Valley to attend. It was conducted in January, which was before most youth selected steers for their respective county fairs.

The topics covered at the education day were: Selecting Your Market Steer and Live Animal Evaluation, Hip Height and Performance, Determining Carcass Quality: Actual and Ultrasound Measurements, Feeding Your Steer: How it Affects Your Placing in the Quality Class, and Factors That Determine Meat Quality. Beef Camp concluded with a taste test, which compared different cuts of beef to show how muscle biology and cooking methods affect eating experience. New York strip steaks of different quality grades were also compared to demonstrate the variation.
Program Outcomes
Beef Camp helped meet the need for more producer education, as well as make youth, parents, and leaders more aware of how management practices affect beef quality for consumers. Furthermore, the connection was made between the beef chain and the consumers.

There were 16 adult and 21 youth participants who attended Beef Camp. Pre- and post-tests were given to each participant who attended the education day to measure an increase in knowledge of beef quality issues. Scores from the pre- to post-tests increased from 42.5% to 90.7%, respectively. This was a 113.2% improvement in knowledge.

In addition, an evaluation was conducted to gain participant input for future Beef Camps and to determine the value of the program. Participants ranked the overall experience of the program and the educational materials provided as 1.4 on a scale of 1-5 (1=outstanding, 2=good, 3=average, 4=poor, 5=unacceptable). All Beef Camp attendees also indicated they learned something new regarding the relationship of livestock management and beef quality. The information provided in the evaluations will be used to improve future Beef Camps.

Beef Camp was instrumental in increasing the understanding of livestock management and beef quality for youth, parents, and leaders. The increase in knowledge validates the need for this type of program. Thus, Extension educators have plans to hold future Beef Camps, which will address the issues of livestock management and how the decisions producers must make affect the beef purchased by the consumer.

FOR MORE INFORMATION
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