

ADVOCATING FOR THE BEEF COMMUNITY; PART ONE

As rough as times may seem today, the beef community has been telling its story in the atmosphere of controversy for many years. Today we face concerns of food safety, environment, animal care, health, and many more. Our's is a topic that touches every person who eats beef, uses leather, or has a concern for their environment. This, along with many other reasons, is why *grassroots advocacy* is so important in promoting our cause and sharing our story. In this instance, ***grassroots advocacy*** represents each individual telling his or her own story of producing food.

As a cattle producer our first reaction to controversy can be defensive, *Why should they determine what I do for a living to be wrongdoing?* Rather, we have an obligation as producers and advocates to be receptive to consumer feedback. ***If consumers have the concern, it is a valid question.*** Consumers have questions about beef and we should hear them out. Once consumers understand that we can be receptive the want to know that ***we hear them, their concerns, are working to address them.*** Let us face it, as cattle producers we know not everything we do may be perfect and we are always working toward progress.

The more consumers know about us, the more they will trust us. This is where social media and community outreach come in as great business tools. Not only can we reach out to those concerned consumers in our community, but also we can keep them current on our production methods and events through blogging, tweets, Facebook pages, and events open to the community.

Worried you have nothing to share? Here is an example. Consumers are concerned about the environment and agriculture's impact on our resources. Farmers and ranchers do something every day to reduce our impact on our environment. We should be sharing this with consumers. Show them what we can do and are changing so we are not passing the blame.

In later parts of this short-series, I will share how to communicate with consumers, what message they are looking for, and tips for approaching your local media. Thank you to Daren Williams of NCBA for sharing his thoughts and the MBA program with me last week.