

## I Wish, I Wish, for a Lifestyle Called Beef

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Talking about the future, an interesting and spell-binding topic, does present some real paradoxes for the old (wise?) and young (inexperienced?) alike. Perhaps the most challenging part of the discussion, however, is the fact that the experienced must begin to assume a more advisory role with the youth.

This requires old-timers to place confidence in the youth and provide support and suggestions as needed. I don't consider myself an old-timer yet, but I do always appreciate the ideas from young counterparts. Each fall, Gary White and I teach a class at Dickinson State University on problems in cow management. I ask the students to write a BeefTalk column to share with the class. No restrictions are placed on the topics.

I thought I would share with you some of their thoughts over the course of several BeefTalks. (Another very interesting point is students tend to say what some of us don't dare say.)

To start off, Mike Wilson from Bainville, Mont., noted, "In supermarkets around the world people are walking past the aisle filled with T-bones, chuck roast, and hamburger and are substituting the 10-pack of Tyson chicken legs or tickling their taste buds with the other white meat. They are doing this for the purely economic reason -- these are a cheaper product.... Beef is inherently more expensive to produce."

In response, I would ask, what could be done to cure the woes of expensive beef? Or do we simply throw in the towel and start building cages?

Mike's outlook is more futuristic: "The beef industry still has things we can smile about. Producers have not vertically integrated and coordinated their jobs and lifestyles into disintegration. Although the beef marketing system is not perfect, the producers have not sold out to the big business of the packers, and there is still room in the beef industry for the small, family-owned and operated business. All phases of the beef industry need to stimulate demand for our product and prevent big business from controlling more than one phase in the

conception to consumption cycle."

I find the comment "coordinated our jobs and lifestyle into disintegration" challenging and perhaps on the leading edge of perception and reality. As with many business presentations or portfolios, the essence of the presentation leads a person to believe life will become more coordinated with the payout or benefit of greater industry integration. This connectivity to the industry, in theory, should bring enhanced security and provide for a better lifestyle.

Now, whether Mr. Wilson intended to or not, notice that he connected the words job and lifestyle. In the beef community, those words are not only connected, but welded together. The integrated approach that some of the other livestock species have accepted as fact appears not to be the path of choice for the young people in the beef industry. I would like to counter with an example of a marriage between big business and a cow that has worked. All I can really say is, if you know of one, send me the information.

As Mr. Wilson is pointing out, and perhaps many in the industry need to remind themselves of, the beef producer does not want a vertically integrated business. The beef producer is in the beef business, and the ability to take risk, share in that risk and in the end provide the consumers with a high-quality beef product is what the business is all about. While doing just that, both the beef producer and the cow have an excellent life.

Yes, the economics of scale and many other principles all point in the opposite direction, but just who is in charge anyway? I will vote on the side of youth, and perhaps, just perhaps, the beef industry can remain a lifestyle.

Your comments are always welcome at [www.BeefTalk.com](http://www.BeefTalk.com). For more information, contact the North Dakota Beef Cattle Improvement Association, 1133 State Avenue, Dickinson, ND 58601 or go to [www.CHAPS2000.com](http://www.CHAPS2000.com) on the Internet. In correspondence about this column, refer to BT0118.

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## Mike Wilson's Five Things You Shouldn't Say at a Beef Producers Meeting

Who forgot  
to invite the CEO  
of Tyson?

The imported  
beef from Mexico  
provides a solid  
floor in the market.

I'm just  
going to eat at  
the salad bar, and  
skip the filet  
mignon.

Beef; it's  
what got passed up  
in favor of chicken  
for tonight.

I wish the  
cattle industry  
would be more  
structured, more  
like the pork  
industry.