

## Can the Cow Do What We Want Her To Do?

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Buzzwords within the corporate world today are vision and focus. Attend any meeting (which may be especially challenging if you are calving, seeding, haying, fencing, etc.) and you will hear those two words.

It is important to open up your mind, to have a vision and focus. The beef industry, definitely is at a point that requires a vision and focus. Producers are experiencing pressure from all angles and something has to give.

Business as usual is not something that will sustain beef producers. The pressure of the business is analogous to the established fact that the surface of the earth is made up of floating plates. Over the millenia, these plates have floated around resulting in the current makeup of the continents we all live on. Those who live near areas where these plates touch certainly understand the concept of two forces meeting. Something must give, and often the result is an earthquake.

The beef industry may not experience quite that much pressure but the same principle is brewing. Something must give. The easy question is should we hunt or not?

History will tell us that beef production evolved as a result of progressive, conservation minded individuals utilizing the land base. The vision and focus through the process was not producing choice beef, but rather consuming what the land produced, i.e. meat. For thousands of years, people were satisfied with the product and actually learned to cook appropriately.

In the past decade or two maybe--but certainly not centuries--a force of knowledge has enabled us to more thoroughly evaluate the beef product with a evolving set of demands from the processor and the end user.

The net result has been a clash of the two plates, if you recall the previous analogy. On one plate is a beef industry entrenched in the land. That land is capable of producing beef but not as uniform and prepackaged as desired. On the other plate are producers, processors and consumers increasing demands for quality and specifications that the old cow may never have been designed to create.

The vision and focus of the beef industry, according to

the marketing experts of the country, is to give people what they want. A major unanswered question is: Can we realistically expect all forces to agree on the quality of the end product? This means meshing production capabilities with end product desires. Producing what people want is the American way of business, but, do we want too much?

The other day at our house, all those knowledgeable in cooking were gone. Just the boys and I were home. We headed to the local store, debated about the deli or preprocessed meat or a nice London broil special (which won out).

Late in the afternoon, the boys and I pulled out some tin foil, placed the beef on the foil, placed several cuts across the meat and added a sprinkle of spices until we were satisfied. We set the oven at 350 degrees, put the meat in the oven and waited. (After briefly checking the Betty Crocker cookbook, we breathed a sigh of relief after finding London broil was actually in the book and we hadn't deviated too far from Betty's recommendations.)

Realizing no one else was there to add the extra side dishes, a can of beans and bread topped off the meal. The end result was an excellent beef supper.

Eating the real product is what life is all about. Our ancestors thought so, and perhaps understood the proper equation is to eat what the land provides, not to eat what we want. Do we change the industry, the product or should we learn to cook and take up hunter safety?

The answer, perhaps, is somewhere in the middle, where both plates need to give little.

May you find all your ear tags.

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 BT0146.

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**Something's Gotta Give**

