

The Future of Beef – Global Competitiveness

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In the world of food production, beef is one piece of a very big picture. Today's beef production plans need to include the rest of the world, which is very complex and sometimes volatile.

Trade across borders means survival. Flynn Adcock and Associates opinioned in "Consumer Issues and Demand," published by the American Agricultural Economics Association's online Choices magazine (www.choicesmagazine.org, Volume 21, No. 3, 2006), that three global forces impacting us are "animal disease outbreaks and discoveries, income growth in developing economies and trade liberalizations." The faces and expressions of these forces are hard to decipher and have many forms.

Sometimes the energy to collectively face the challenges evades us, so we retreat. It is easy to sit and ponder the future of one's ranch or farm as the outreaches of the world drift away. That is how it was for decades as American producers were comforted with the concept that they were feeding the world. Producers stood knowing they were helping people around the world, but never would see all of it.

Those thoughts went beyond market value, the need to make a profit or the need for material things. Growing up, one of the biggest days on the farm was filling the potato bin.

The potato digger, originally pulled by horses and then adapted to a small International Farmall tractor, was a marvelous device. All one had to do was sit on the old seat and lift the front end as the driver turned from one row to the next.

The potatoes would roll up the chain, shedding the soil as the potatoes moved under your feet and fell on top of the ground. White potatoes were for baking, red for lefsa and other uses. By the end of the day, the potato bin was full.

The chickens already were in the freezer and the laying hens were moved to a winterized shed. Nobody said anything to the pigs because deer hunting season

wasn't over. The beef harvest was a bigger job, but a locker plant could be found to help process, cut and wrap the boxes of meat. The only real indication that the inventory had changed was the great aroma of fresh blood sausage cooking in the kitchen oven.

Basement shelves were filled with garden produce just waiting to fill our plates as the year went on. How could one complain? The family had food for another year and the world didn't do so badly, either.

Yesterday is no longer here. Lefsa can be made from potatoes in a box. There's hardly a home around that actually has a year's worth of food stored in the cellar or a full potato bin (a what?). The typical beef producer today frequents the local supermarket as often as those living in town.

As beef producers, we rely on the rest of the world to supply us with our other needs, including almost all of what we eat. Sitting and pondering today certainly brings up different visions. There still is comfort in supplying food to others, but there is less comfort knowing that our own cellars are no longer filled. We simply depend, like many in the world, on the ability to purchase what we need to survive.

For the beef industry, the point is that the world changed. We fed the world, we educated the world and so the world and the people changed. They don't really need us.

Harvesting potatoes was simple and pondering our future was fun. However, the pondering is gone and in its place is the need to better understand global impacts and realize that we are just one of many in pursuit of the good life.

May you find all your ear tags.

Your comments are always welcome at www.BeefTalk.com. For more information, contact the North Dakota Beef Cattle Improvement Association, 1041 State Avenue, Dickinson, ND 58601 or go to www.CHAPS2000.com on the Internet. In correspondence about this column, refer to BT0324.

Three Key Global Forces Shaping Our Beef Production

- 1. Animal disease outbreaks and discoveries.**
- 2. Income growth in developing economies.**
- 3. Trade liberalization.**

Adapted from F.J. Adcock, et. al. (www.choicesmagazine.org, Volume 21, No. 3, 2006)