



Building Trust from the Ground Up: How Sustainable Livestock Consumption Connects Producers and People

Provided by the U.S. Roundtable for Sustainable Beef (USRSB) in recognition of the International Year of Rangelands and Pastoralists (IYRP).

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The July theme of the International Year of Rangelands and Pastoralists (IYRP) focused on Sustainable Consumption of Livestock Products. This topic centers around the value animal-source foods hold in society and provides us with the opportunity to consider an important reality: sustainable food systems are intrinsically linked to and dependent on sustainable livestock production.

Here's what we know - conversations around livestock consumption are complex.

When we think about it on a global scale, the differences in consumption are endless, whether that be lack of access to nutrient-dense foods, such as beef, or a changing consumer base. Regardless of the barrier, championing the role livestock systems play in supporting both people and the planet remains a priority, and progress requires a shared understanding of this truth.

Sustainable consumption directly connects the way cattle are raised to how resources are managed, and in turn, this is how trust is built from pasture to plate.

Setting the Stage

From pastoral systems in developing countries to specialized production systems in the United States, ruminant livestock, like cattle and sheep, play a critical role in global nutrition and livelihoods.

With rangelands covering more than half of the world's land surface, much of which is not suitable for crop production or other uses, ruminants convert grass and forages into high-quality protein, making efficient use of natural resources while supporting rural economies and providing a nutrient-dense product.

The role of livestock, however, extends beyond production alone. These systems are shaped by local environments, available resources, cultural practices, and the nutritional needs of communities around the world.

This diversity highlights the importance of balanced, science-based conversations that recognize both the nutritional value of animal protein and the role of responsible production in supporting resilient and sustainable food systems.

Balancing Nutrition, Perception and Responsibility

In the U.S., cattle producers operate within a system that must meet evolving consumer expectations while maintaining strong production practices.

Sustainable livestock consumption is built on three key considerations:

- Nutritional value
- Consumer trust
- Responsible production

Today's consumers are more interested than ever in where their food comes from. They want to understand how animals are raised and how land is managed.

For producers, this means that sustainability extends beyond the pasture. It includes communication, education and a willingness to engage in conversations about food production.

While much of the discussion around consumption happens at the consumer level, producers play a central role in shaping that conversation.

From adopting practices that prioritize soil health to ensuring animal well-being, producers are contributing to a more sustainable food system. Sharing those efforts helps bridge the gap between production and perception.

Sustainable Consumption and Ecosystem Connection

Sustainable consumption is closely tied to how livestock systems interact with natural resources.

Well-managed grazing systems support soil health, improve water infiltration and promote biodiversity. These outcomes contribute to the production of nutrient-dense food while maintaining the integrity of the land.

As awareness of these connections grows, more consumers are recognizing that livestock production can be part of a sustainable food system.

This shift creates opportunities to highlight the full picture of livestock systems, not just the end product, but the environmental and social benefits that come with it.

Support for Continuous Improvement

For producers and industry stakeholders looking to support continuous improvement, a variety of resources are available:

- [U.S. Roundtable for Sustainable Beef](#) – Offers educational tools, sustainability frameworks and resources to support continuous improvement across the beef value chain.

- [Beef Quality Assurance \(BQA\)](#) – Provides guidelines and training that reinforce best practices in animal care and handling.
- [The Beef Checkoff](#) – Supports consumer outreach and education initiatives.

Looking Ahead

This IYRP theme reinforces a key idea: sustainable livestock consumption is built on connection. Connection between producers and consumers, between land and food, and between understanding and trust.

For U.S. cattle producers, this represents both a challenge and an opportunity. By continuing to prioritize sustainable management and engage in open, transparent communication, producers can help shape a more informed and balanced conversation around beef as a nutrient-dense, high-quality product.

As global attention continues to focus on rangelands and food systems, the role of livestock in providing nutritious food and supporting sustainable landscapes remains essential. Strengthening that connection will be critical to ensuring the long-term resilience of both the industry and the communities it supports.