

Adding Value to Grass-Fed Beef Niche Marketing Efforts

Cynthia Daley (Professional Development Grant Program)

Project Number: EW04-012

Title: Adding Value to Grass-Fed Beef Niche Marketing Efforts

Principal Investigator:

Cynthia Daley
College of Agriculture
California State University, Chico
Plumas Hall #317
Chico, CA 95929
530.898.6280
cdaley@csuchico.edu



Participants:

Glenn Nader, UCCE Livestock and Range Management Advisor, Butte, Yuba, and Sutter counties
Stephanie Larson, UCCE Livestock and Range Management Advisor, Marin and Sonoma counties
Marin Sun Farms, David Evans, Iverness, CA
High Sierra Beef, Dan Macon, Auburn, CA
Western Grasslands Beef Inc., Sacramento
Neff Family Ranches, Newport Beach CA



SARE Grant: \$60,000

Situation

The 'natural' and 'organic' markets in the beef industry are growing at 24% a year with sales revenue of more than \$350 million. Such niche markets can be financially rewarding to small and mid-size producers unable to compete with low margins received in the commodity market.

However, to succeed, niche marketers must differentiate their product by telling its story or providing brand recognition. One way is to have specific information that verifies the healthful aspects of the products and to employ a marketing plan to promote the product and these beneficial attributes.

Objectives

1. Provide training and education for producers and extension personnel related to the potential health benefits of grass-fed beef products
2. Provide producers with complete reports of their grass-fed product in total lipid analysis (supplied by a concurrent CSUC Applied Agricultural Research Initiative project)
3. Provide support for the maintenance and enhancement of the grass-fed beef website www.csuchico.edu/agr/grassfedbeef/
4. Provide one-to-one support for grass-fed beef producers to develop their own personal labels appropriate for USDA approval through annual grass-fed beef workshops

Actions

The project conducted four niche marketing conferences. In addition to covering such topics niche marketing trends and options, feeds for growth and product quality, meat quality assessments, and food safety, the conferences addressed:

- Labeling meat products according to USDA guidelines and how to create your own label, process verification, and FSIS regulations
- How to add an "omega-3" label claim to your grass-fed product
- Consumer information on how to prepare grass-fed meat products – recipes for virtually every cut
- A comprehensive listing of published work in the area of grass-fed meat production in these areas:
 - Effect of diet on lipid profiles in the final meat product
 - Health and nutrition literature as it relates to grass-fed meat
 - Forages and performance
 - Carcass quality and consumer taste panels

The educational website, www.csuchico.edu/agr/grassfedbeef/ is being maintained on the CSU Chico server as a service to the industry. The site includes information on health benefits of grass-fed beef, niche marketing, labeling, recipes, research, and a cost study.



Workshops taught participants to better understand the various cuts of meat.

Results

The conference attendance ranged between 30 to 125 attendees per day, including producers, alliance and meat cooperative representatives, retailers, processors, extension personnel, students, and academics. The proceedings of each conference have been posted to the educational website.

Based on participant feedback, the conferences covered topics of interest. A 2006 survey showed the percentage of attendees who rated as 'good' to 'excellent' these attributes:

- 96% were satisfied with material covered
- 92% said the event increased or enhanced their knowledge of the subject
- 92% said they expect to use what they gained in their work
- 83% said the handouts were useful
- 96% rated the conference as good to excellent

Lipid profile assessments were done for participating producers, with meat samples from each evaluated in triplicate. Data were analyzed and reports generated for producers.

The project also obtained an 'omega-3' label claim for the CSU-Chico natural, grass-fed beef product through the USDA Food Safety Inspection Service. USDA standards have been posted to the website for producer review.

The project team completed several tasks in addition to the original objectives of the SARE-funded project:

1. Laboratory assessment and data analysis to support the claim that grass-fed beef products contain elevated levels of omega-3 and CLA at all degrees of fatness
2. Laboratory assessment and data analysis on the effect of ration on lipid profiles in steers – grain, grain/grass, and grass only
3. An unofficial producer taste panel conducted during a niche marketing conference to determine preferences between grass-fed and grain-fed steaks



Cattle graze at twilight near Chico.

Potential Benefits

The impact of the projects accomplishments is expected to be an increase in the number of grass-fed producers using 'omega-3' labeling to enhance marketability of grass-fed meat products.

At the same time, consumers will become aware that grass-fed meat products can be a source of omega-3 in their diets.

The project team worked with three cooperators to assist in the process and anticipated that others will follow.



Grass-fed cattle seek midday shade at CSU Chico pastures.



An example of labeling that promotes omega-3 benefits of natural, grass-fed beef.