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## What is beef sustainability?

What is sustainable beef production? Does it relate to environmentally-friendly land management, socially-responsible farming practices, financially-profitable beef production enterprises, or all of the above?

And, once defined, how can the global beef industry effectively demonstrate to consumers that its product is indeed “sustainable”, and what is that process likely to mean for producers at farm-level?

All of these questions are currently in the spotlight as the Global Roundtable for Sustainable Beef looks to progress its vision to achieve sustainable beef production systems and value chains around the world.

The GRSB involves groups from throughout the global beef production chain including the peak national producer representative groups from Australia, Canada and the United States, major supply chain players including JBS, Cargill, Merck, Walmart, McDonalds, and Woolworths (among many others), and the World Wildlife Fund.

The roundtable has just released its draft Principles and Criteria for Global Sustainable Beef for public comment, which aim to pinpoint the areas of the beef value chain that must be addressed to ensure beef production around the globe is environmentally sound, socially responsible and economically viable.

(You can read the just-released GRSB document outlining the draft principles and criteria [here](#). The opportunity for public comment runs until May 16, 2014).

Advocates say the GRSB process is ultimately about maintaining consumer support for beef and selling more of the product in future, by ensuring the industry is keeping pace with changing consumer demands. In that regard being able to demonstrate that beef is produced in a sustainable way is of benefit to all players in the beef value chain from producers through to retailers.

For some producers, however, the involvement of the WWF in particular raises a red flag that triggers immediate caution. The WWF has traditionally, and at times successfully, campaigned to impose onerous restrictions on agricultural land management practices in Australia. Some producers believe the GRSB process will ultimately result in production enterprises being forced to shoulder additional regulatory costs and certification requirements just to maintain access to existing markets. Others say the Roundtable is structured in such a way that no single group can impose their agenda on the broader group, and say producer participation is essential to ensure they can help to produce a workable definition and guidelines.

The draft GRSB principles and criteria document acknowledges that after an agreed set of principles and criteria has been agreed to and adopted, the next steps will be to determine how sustainability will be measured and verified. It notes that the means of verification developed to support the principles and criteria will vary from one local region to the next.

The document specifically states that the GRSB does not intend to "set standards or to create a certification program".

Rather, its intent is to “provide a common baseline understanding of sustainable beef that national roundtables and other initiatives can use to meet their needs.”

The door is left open for individual players aligned with the roundtable to use the principles and criteria currently being developed as the foundation for their own initiatives which are aligned with the GRSB mission.



# AWGA - News Update

Earlier this year McDonald's announced a goal to begin purchasing "verified" sustainable beef in 2016.

McDonald's acknowledges that the major problem with achieving this goal is that there is currently no universally accepted definition of what sustainable beef is, or any metrics to measure or demonstrate the beef has indeed been produced in a sustainable way, which is what the GRSB process is currently aiming to do.

The GRSB has created its own definition for Sustainable Beef which is as follows:

"We define sustainable beef as a socially responsible, environmentally sound and economically viable product that prioritizes Planet (relevant principles: Natural Resources, Efficiency & Innovation, People and the Community); People (relevant principles: People and the Community and Food); Animals (relevant principle: Animal health and welfare); and Progress (relevant principles: Natural Resources, People and the Community, Animal health and welfare, Food, Efficiency and Innovation).

In the United States the National Cattleman's Beef Association has defined sustainability as "balancing environmental responsibility, economic opportunity and social diligence", as NCBA spokesperson Kim Stackhouse-Lawson recently told the US farm media. "To the producers at home, this is really about continuing to leave ranches from generation to generation, improving their livelihoods and contributing and providing for local communities."

The Cattle Council of Australia has not yet finalized its own definition of sustainable beef, telling Beef Central it is currently seeking producer views on what they see as 'sustainability' through this consultation process. Their responses will help to inform the CCA's view which will then be communicated to the GRSB.

CCA president Andrew Ogilvie is urging Australian cattle producers to provide input into the GRSB process to ensure that the principles and criteria developed are workable for the Australian beef industry.

"Of particular concern to the Cattle Council of Australia is ensuring economic sustainability for the Australian industry," Mr Ogilvie said. "The Australian beef industry is one of the most efficient in the world, but by no means is it the most economically viable."

<http://beefcentral.com.au/p/news/article/4399>