

Collegiate Millennials' Perceptions of Locally Produced Beef

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Recommended Citation

Shelby Oesterreicher; Lundy, Lisa K.; Rumble, Joy N.; and Telg, Ricky W. (2018) "Collegiate Millennials' Perceptions of Locally Produced Beef," *Journal of Applied Communications*: Vol. 102: Iss. 4.
<https://doi.org/10.4148/1051-0834.2226>

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Abstract

Millennial consumers are stepping into important roles as decision makers and consumers. A knowledge and communication gap exists between cattle producers and consumers this knowledge seeking generation. This study focused on collegiate millennials' perceptions of locally produced beef. The research design was qualitative in nature using focus groups. Participants associated the beef industry and beef products with the environment, management practices, treatment of animals, human health concerns, retail, experience with the beef industry, experience with beef, and transparency. Results of this study showed participants had minimal knowledge of the industry and relatively negative perceptions of the industry and beef products. Participants were skeptical of communication materials promotion beef and expressed particular distrust toward video messages. Participants revealed a knowledge and communication gap between producers and consumers.

Keywords

perceptions, local, beef, focus groups, consumer perceptions

Cover Page Footnote/Acknowledgements

This manuscript was based on research presented at the 2018 Association for Communication Excellence (ACE) annual conference in Scottsdale, AZ.

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United States consumers are changing the way they define and view beef quality (Lovelace, 2016). Consumers are beginning to consider beef labeled with distinctions, such as local, natural, or certified, to be of greater quality than beef without those distinctions (Lovelace, 2016). In recent years, an increase has been seen in consumer interest in purchasing locally grown produce and animal products (Carpio & Isengildina-Massa, 2009). The rise in consumer interest in local agricultural products has correlated with the number of state departments of agriculture and branding programs participating in the promotion of locally grown food (Carpio & Isengildina-Massa, 2009). Consumers have perceived purchasing local food as supporting the economy and encouraging environmental benefits (Zepeda & Leviten-Reid, 2004). Discovering what is important to consumers when purchasing beef products will aid in the marketing of the product.

An important audience for beef marketing is the group of about 80 million consumers born between 1980 and 2000, also known as the millennial generation (Beef Checkoff, 2014). According to Beef Checkoff (2014), the millennial generation consumes the most beef in both the home and restaurants of any generation and will be the next influencers of demand for the next several decades. While 54% of millennials say they would rather cook a meal at home than go out to eat, 54% also say it is hard to know which cuts of meat to choose (Beef Board, 2015). Fifty percent of millennials say they would buy more beef if they knew more about the cuts they were purchasing (Beef Board, 2015).

Within the agricultural communications field, it has been suggested that U.S. citizens do not have accurate knowledge or proper perceptions of the agricultural industry as a whole, including the beef industry. According to Rumble and Buck (2013), the public is somewhat knowledgeable about livestock production; however, a knowledge gap exists between producers and consumers. Their study suggested that while consumers have some knowledge, their perceptions and justifications for their beliefs are sometimes inaccurate (Rumble & Buck, 2013). It is the responsibility of agricultural communicators and producers within the industry to bridge this knowledge gap.

Product branding programs have become an increasingly popular way market select beef to consumers. Those in the beef industry recognized the importance of providing the consumer with what they are looking for in order to increase their consumption of beef products. Branded beef programs aim to ensure consumer satisfaction and future sales growth (Harsh & VanOverbeke, 2014).

According to Jekanowski, Williams, and Schiek (2000), state-funded programs aimed at promoting or identifying agricultural products produced within the state are increasingly desirable in the consumer market. The programs are expected to grow in popularity as agricultural markets become increasingly global, and as U.S. producers face greater competition from foreign markets (Jekanowski et al., 2000). State promotion programs are becoming increasingly popular and are aimed at building consumer awareness surrounding local agricultural commodities (Jekanowski et al., 2000).

Literature Review

Understanding consumer interests and perceptions can aid in the development of agricultural campaigns and communication efforts in an effort to bridge the farm-to-table gap that is present

within the industry (Holt, 2014). Florida Cattle Ranchers, LLC (FCR) is an emerging organization in the beef industry with a need to understand the preferences of the millennial generation regarding Florida beef products. FCR began selling its beef products in select grocery stores in Florida and has been branded as a Florida beef product marketed specifically to Florida residents. In order for products such as this Florida beef product to be successful, knowing consumers' perceptions of the product and communication efforts are vital. This study was completed in partnership with FCR to help them understand consumer perceptions.

Consumer Perceptions of Beef

Verbeke and Vackier (2004) examined how consumer involvement in an issue or their personal connection could affect attitude formation pertaining to perceptions of fresh meat. The sample of participants was divided into four groups: meat lovers, meat consumers, cautious meat lovers, and concerned meat consumers. The study found that cautious meat lovers and concerned meat consumers had strong perceptions of meat risks. However, straightforward meat lovers focused mainly on taste as a major component of their attitude formation. Indifferent consumers relied mainly on price. Verbeke and Vackier found that meat lovers, or those who were highly involved, focused on intangible qualities, as well as the other qualities each group focused on to form their attitudes. This research supports the view that personal relevance is connected to an individual's motivation to process persuasive communication and can lead to high levels of elaboration.

The Millennial Generation

While there are varied descriptions of millennials, for the purpose of this study we identify millennials as those born between 1982 and 2004 (Bump, 2014; Horovitz, 2012). The millennial generation has grown up in a world filled with continuously expanding technology and media. Information is at their fingertips and is considered to have access to more information than any other generation in history (Considine, 2009). According to Considine (2009) even though millennials have access to such a wealth of information, they are still lacking in literacy skills that are the foundation of success in both an academic environment and life.

Millennial Perceptions of Beef: Industry Research

In 2014, Shugoll Research conducted a study funded by and for The Beef Checkoff program regarding millennials' attitudes about beef. According to the study, millennials typically eat beef about twice a week, which is about the same as non-millennials, and it is usually in the form of ground beef (Shugoll, 2014; Neuman, 2013). Millennials are cost conscious when shopping for beef and the five most important factors to millennials when deciding what to eat include: "great taste, good value, feeling comfortable and confident in preparing the dish, being a food they feel good about and having an ideal balance of taste and nutrition" (Shugoll, 2014, p.9). The study also found that only about one-third of millennials are concerned about how cattle are raised and treated and about four in ten say their concern impacts the food they consume (Shugoll, 2014). According to Shugoll (2014), when purchasing a steak, millennials look to be sure the fat is trimmed from the outer edges, but still want some marbling for flavor. Millennials primarily look to websites, friends and family, Pinterest and cookbooks for cooking ideas; they typically look for meal ideas that are easy to prepare and last more than one meal (Shugoll, 2014).

Another study conducted by The Beef Checkoff (2015) found "Millennials are frustrated about the contradictory information about whether or not beef is good for you" (p. 20). Production issues are considered an emotional issue and not easily resolved once brought up in a discussion (The

Beef Checkoff, 2015). The same study found millennials associate eating beef with certain emotions including anticipation, excitement, satisfaction, comfort, and nostalgia (The Beef Checkoff, 2015). Millennials are considered an "and" not an "or" generation of people, meaning they feel as though they can have more of everything (The Beef Checkoff, 2015).

One study conducted by The Beef Checkoff (2014) examined millennial perceptions of beef production. The study explored the most effective means of positively communicating to millennials about the feedlot as well as debunking the myths about the idea of "factory farming" (The Beef Checkoff, 2014, p. 3). The other main objective of the study was to utilize the information gained to develop communications strategies to address the negative outlook the public has of the industry (The Beef Checkoff, 2014). Forty-four percent of the participants associated the entire production process with "factory farming" (The Beef Checkoff, 2014, p. 8). The study found millennials associate "factory farming" with inhumane treatment of animals and negative perceptions (The Beef Checkoff, 2014, p. 7). Along with an emotional response to beef, "millennials express high levels of suspicion, worry, and uncertainty about factory farming [and] positive emotions are very low" (The Beef Checkoff, 2014, p. 12). The participants were also exposed to a variety of educational and informational stimuli related to the beef industry (The Beef Checkoff, 2014). "The initial stimuli had a positive impact; in fact, many even claimed to have a more positive view on the beef production process from simply hearing a brief description of the beef production process" (The Beef Checkoff, 2014, p. 14).

While investigations of millennials' perceptions of beef (Beef, 2014) have been conducted, none have focused on local beef products and more specifically in Florida. Broadly, consumers because of the benefits it provides to the environment, local economy, tastes, nutrition, quality, and safety (Ruehle & Goldblatt, 2013; Bond, Thilmany, & Bond, 2008) prefer local food. Millennials currently have more purchasing power, compared to other generations when they were their current age: 15 to 29 (Hais & Winograd, 2011). From a producer's standpoint, understanding how the millennial generation responds to information related to beef the beef industry is vital to the future success of their operations (Beef, 2014). Millennials make choices regarding their personal food consumption behavior and will be the next generation of influencers regarding the food and agricultural industry.

The two focuses of this study were to discover what millennial consumers looked for when they purchase beef products and what was most attractive to them about the organization's current communication platforms/strategies. With this information, agricultural communicators, specifically within the beef industry, will be able to better attract and communicate with the millennial generation of consumers. Understanding preferences of the millennial generation when purchasing beef products will help cattlemen to better market their products. Determining the aspects of beef production that are most important to the millennial generation will help beef producers build loyalty with consumers.

Millennials are considered to be an important generation of consumers because they are the next generation of consumers. According to a 2011 study conducted by the Beef Checkoff program, millennials enjoy beef but have little education surrounding beef and how to cook it (The Beef Checkoff, 2013). According to the 2011 study, 54 percent of millennials say it is hard for them to know which cuts of meat to choose and 56 percent of them report disappointment after consuming the beef meal they prepared (The Beef Checkoff, 2013). Millennials are considered a knowledge seeking generation and 75 percent of them are interested in information about steaks and how to prepare them (The Beef Checkoff, 2013). The knowledge gap is an important factor when considering millennials' perceptions and understanding what information they are seeking.

Twenty-four percent of millennials say they would look for information from different avenues, such as brochures, recipes, and at the meat counter (The Beef Checkoff, 2013).

Purpose and Objectives

The purpose of this study was to determine collegiate millennials' perceptions of Florida-produced beef. This study sought to investigate the following objectives:

1. Determine which characteristics and features of the beef industry the millennial generation will find important when purchasing beef.
2. Determine which characteristics and features of beef products the millennial generation will find most important when purchasing beef.
3. Determine Florida millennial consumers' perceptions of the Florida beef industry and Florida -raised beef.
4. Determine Florida millennial consumers' preferences of information provided by current communication pieces by organization.

Methods

In order to gain a robust understanding of millennials' perspectives on the issue, a qualitative method of research was employed in the form of focus groups. The guiding ontological belief in this study was that millennials' perceptions are based on their past experiences and the personal relevance the issue has to them. One advantage of utilizing focus groups as a form of data collection is the participants are interviewed all at the same time and are able to respond to both the moderator as well as the other participants (Ary et al., 2014). The participants were free to share their thoughts and opinions pertaining to beef on a local and general level as well as their purchasing behaviors. Another advantage of using this type of data collection is participants may reveal more of their points of view because others' thoughts may encourage a reaction or depth of thought (Ary et al., 2014).

An interview protocol was created in the form of a moderator's guide, which included instructions for the moderator/focus group facilitators, questions, and probes. A researcher's journal was also utilized to record common themes and reactions from the participants. Each of the focus groups was audio and video recorded and transcribed by the principle investigator.

This study consisted of three focus groups with 18 participants total. The focus groups consisted of both male and female participants. The groups ranged from five to seven participants. According to Morgan (1998), smaller groups give participants more time to speak and interject personal anecdotes and experiences. With a study such as this one, it is important to gain an in-depth understanding of each participant's opinions (Morgan, 1998). Emotionally charged and controversial topics benefit from smaller groups because the moderator is able to pay close attention to each participant and their needs (Morgan, 1998).

The first phase of each focus group consisted of the participants being asked about their personal experience with beef and the Florida beef industry. The participants were asked a series of questions focused on their prior knowledge of the beef industry and their personal relevance to the issue. The second phase of each focus group prompted the participants to look at several communication materials created by an organization in the industry, focused on local beef production and sales. The participants were then asked to create a thought-listing of each of the

pieces. They were also prompted to share their thoughts with the rest of the group. The video showed to participants was a promotional piece about FCR featuring two interviews of ranchers; their families and the organization's Chief Executive Officer. A single ranch was featured and included shots of cattle in pastures, families mingling and eating, cooking on the grill, and different shots of the ranch. The mission and values of the organization were discussed throughout the video as well. Participants also gave feedback on the organization's website, Facebook, Instagram, the organization's logo, a recipe card, a blog post, and a rack card. In each phase of the study, the participants were encouraged to share their genuine thoughts and opinions regarding the issue.

The population of interest in this study was the collegiate millennial generation. The participants were volunteers from a course at the University of Florida ranging in age from 18- to 21-years-old. This generation is of interest because of their potential buying power and decision-making skills. This generation is of collegiate age and older; therefore, they are likely making independent decisions about their food purchasing behavior and beginning to form more solid opinions about issues.

Non-probability sampling was utilized when selecting the sample of participants for this study. Both purposive sampling and convenience sampling were used to compile the sample of participants. Purposive sampling was one of the factors preventing the generalizability of results. Purposive sampling was utilized because of the specific need for millennial participants as they have a large amount of purchasing power and consume information differently than other generations. We also purposively sought out students who were not majoring in agriculture or related sciences. While one of the participants was an animal science major, the participants were largely students outside of agriculture or related sciences. We did this by recruiting students from a university-wide innovation program. Convenience sampling was implemented because University of Florida students were easily accessible to the principle investigator and the course utilized provided a diverse group of the population. These modes of sampling allowed the researcher to gain an in-depth understanding of the thoughts and views of Florida millennial collegiate students. The students were recruited to participate in the focus groups through a class visit from the lead researcher as well as an e-learning announcement. The participants were also provided with incentives of extra credit and gift cards.

A panel of focus group experts specializing in agricultural communication and public opinion reviewed the moderator's guides for the study prior to data collection. Reliability procedures for this study also included double-checking the focus group transcripts to be sure they matched the audio and video recording. Peer debriefing was utilized to ensure the reliability of the data collection and analysis. The transcripts were co-coded for common themes to ensure the reliability of the researcher. Any discrepancies were addressed between the coders in order to ensure the most accurate results.

Results

Participants' demographic information contributed to the understanding of the findings. Participants filled out an open-ended questionnaire at the start of the focus group. Participants were asked their age, gender, ethnicity, and major in college. Each participant was asked to introduce him or herself and tell a little bit about him or herself resulting in them telling the groups where they were originally from. The majority of participants were originally from the State of Florida, however, not all of them were.

Table 1

Participant Demographics

Group	Age	Race	Gender	Major	Eats Beef	Pseudonym
One	20	Other	Female	Anthropology	No	Ashley
One	20	Hispanic	Female	Telecommunication-News	Yes	Jessica
One	20	African American	Female	Business Information Systems	No	Peyton
One	20	African American	Male	Political Science	Yes	Jeremy
One	21	White	Female	Sociology	Yes	Bella
One	21	White	Female	Anthropology	Yes	Tiffany
Two	20	African American	Male	Journalism	Yes	Levy
Two	20	Asian	Male	Computer Science	Yes	John
Two	19	White	Female	Marketing	Yes	Kara
Two	19	White	Female	Finance	Yes	Taylor
Two	20	White	Female	Marketing	Yes	Kylie
Three	20	Asian	Male	Chemistry	Yes	Gordon
Three	21	Hispanic	Female	Visual Arts	No	Anne
Three	19	Hispanic	Male	Animal Science	Yes	Wallace
Three	21	Hispanic	Female	Psychology	No	Charlotte
Three	20	White	Female	Sustainability	No	Natalie
Three	18	White	Male	Industrial Engineering	No	Case
Three	20	White	Male	Sustainability	Yes	Dalton

Perceptions of Cattle Production

Participants were asked questions related to their thoughts regarding cattle production in relation to a series of topics, including the environment, land conservation, water quality and

quantity, wildlife, the rancher, and the care of animals. The participants were then asked if any of the connections had an influence on their decision to purchase beef. Themes discovered surrounding the "environment" were mainly negative regarding the industry as a whole, however, there were some mentions of "land conservation" efforts in a positive sense. "Sustainability" was also a common thread throughout the focus groups. Themes discovered surrounding "management practices" were also revealed mainly in a negative context and stereotyped in either a "local" or "corporate" context. The themes discovered surrounding the "treatment of animals" were related to "animal health" or "corporate farming."

Perceptions of the Use of Natural Resources in Beef Production

Each group expressed their concern for the effect cattle ranching is having on the "environment." Some participants were particularly passionate about the negative effects cattle ranching has on "climate change," "global warming," and the "methane" production of cattle. However, one participant with specific knowledge of the beef industry raised conflicting views of the effects. The participant discussed "regulation" of "the waste of the animals" as well as the idea that the ranchers "find a way to re-implement the manure."

Participants in all three groups brought up concerns for the quantity of water used to produce beef products. Each group viewed water as a major environmental concern because of the amount of water beef production uses. One participant said, "to make one hamburger it's like 15 days' worth of showers. Like it wastes a lot of water to produce cows like beef and stuff." Participants in group two never quantified exactly how much water they believed was used in the production; however, they said, "a lot of water." One participant in group three said, "I read actually to produce one pound of beef it takes like 70 pounds of water."

Perceptions of Management Practices in Beef Production

Each group discussed the management practices of the beef cattle industry and continuously referenced "corporate" or "local" types of farming or ranching to categorize their thoughts and beliefs. One participant from group two expressed the thought that "cattle ranchers...the big ones" are solely focused on "proficiency" and only see the cattle as "numbers." Another participant said, "They just want to be efficient." Another participant said "perception" of a corporate operation is that "higher-ups...don't really work on the farm, they own it" and someone else does the work resulting in a disconnect.

Overall, the groups deemed "corporate" farming or ranching as negative and generally found "local" or "small-scale" operations to have positive connotations. One participant from group two said, "I think the size really probably makes a difference." A participant said ranchers "treat their animals well when it's on a small scale." Another participant said, "if it's more local they'll have less cows so maybe that's something that they truly care about."

Perceptions of the Treatment of Animals in Beef Production

Another common thread present in all of the groups was the "treatment of animals." "Animal health" and "humane" practices were referenced throughout each of the groups. "Corporate farming" was also a major theme present within the discussion of "treatment of animals." The beef products specifically were also referenced within each group discussion in reference to this topic.

While the majority of participants viewed the treatment of cattle to be less than ideal, the groups tended to agree that the treatment of cattle would affect the quality of meat produced. An example of the participants' responses was, "Um I think a lot of like how good the meat is or how

fresh it is, has a lot to do with what the rancher feeds the cow and how well they take care of them.” One participant from group three with a differing opinion of how well the cattle were treated said:

I feel like a lot of these animals are actually treated fairly well even in the big corporations just because animals, if they don't produce well or if they aren't raised well they aren't really going to produce well.

One participant from group one referenced the same idea saying, "So, I guess um if they're treated better, the quality of meat would be higher." Another participant from group two also said, "great care for your cattle, you get a great product."

In every group, comments were made concerning the health of cattle in reference to "pesticides," "hormones," and "antibiotics." However, the only concern for the meat product was in reference to pesticides, for example, one participant said, "cows are eating pesticides and stuff because they're trying to put pesticides on the crops to keep the insects away and then it goes into the meat."

Perceptions of Food Safety and Beef Production

A major concern for every group was “food safety” factors surrounding beef. Food preparation is one aspect that each group discussed. A participant from group three said they would rather purchase “frozen prepackaged meat” because they believe there is “less of a risk of contracting” a disease or getting sick in comparison to purchasing “raw meat.” The same participant discussed the shelf life of beef items after they are cooked; the participant said, “They go bad fast and like you have to prepare them pretty much that day and then after you prepare them, they go bad quickly.”

Participants’ concerns for “food safety” affect the way they cook and order beef products. One participant stated they like meat “really well done” because “when it’s all red” in the center, it “freaks” them out. A participant from group one expressed their concern for not cooking the meat “correctly” referring to the “steroids” in beef being a “danger.” Another participant from group one said, “Like I will burn my meat like I’m so worried that I’m going to get sick or something.” The participants expressed serious regard for their personal health when it comes to cooking the meat products.

The participants discussed the risk of consuming beef products from a restaurant and mentioned the warning displayed on menus concerning the risk of consuming raw meat. The following sum up the participants’ views:

I think if you don't have anything that's not like well-done; like I feel like if you can see the pink in it, you're technically putting yourself at risk even if it's not. I mean it's not extremely common, I think a lot of people eat medium or medium rare and that's completely fine for them. But I think, you know, there's always a risk if you haven't cooked it all the way through.

A consistent perception of the participants was that the more labels a package of beef has, the more the meat will cost. One participant said, "I think, usually, beef the more labels it has the more expensive it is. Like no hormones, grass fed and all those other labels make it more expensive for some reason." A participant from group two offered, "I always find it ironic when it comes to beef...that says grass fed. You expect it to be grass fed. It's a cow...If they're recently putting on, if grass fed has become a buzzword on packaging...so that's one thing to look out for." The participant went on to say "I look for what says grass-fed" when purchasing beef products because

of the recent focus on the idea. Several labels were associated with being a "healthier" option including, "grass-fed," "no preservatives," and "local."

Overall, the majority of participants agreed that price was a factor in their decision to purchase beef products. In some cases, the participants said they considered how many meals they can get out of a piece of meat before purchasing it. Throughout the discussion of a connection between cost and beef products, most participants had this perception of beef, "Beef can be expensive." One participant from group three said, "...meat and cost was probably the priciest thing on my grocery list."

Each group of participants said they try to purchase the "cheapest" beef option or shy away from buying beef products because they are "expensive." One participant discussed "buying within a budget" stating that "cost is a very important thing." Another common theme was the participants' habit of purchasing beef that is more expensive when their parents are involved. For instance, one participant stated when she shops with her mother, they will purchase beef from "Ward's" grocery store because it is "fresh and local." On the other hand, the participants expressed their interest in knowing where their beef comes from and mentions "local" production as a positive label. One participant from group two discussed "pump[ing] money back into the local economy" as a positive side effect of purchasing local beef.

Perceptions of Florida's Beef Industry and Its Marketing

When asked specifically about the Florida beef industry and Florida beef, participants continuously reverted to referencing the national industry and exhibited minimal to no knowledge of the state industry. Participants had slightly more knowledge of the overall, broad idea of the Florida beef industry than they did of Florida beef products specifically. Most of the participants' experience with the Florida beef industry came from driving down the road and seeing cattle in pastures. The participants had almost no experience with the Florida beef product and only a small number had actually purchased "local" beef products.

Participants were asked probing questions about where they get their information and in many cases, the information was offered within a statement made with no prompting. This was also explored through a series of communication materials from FCR presented to each group. Discussion and thought listings aided in the exploration of this objective. The communication materials included a promotional video, a website, two social media platforms (Facebook and Instagram), the FCR logo and label, a recipe card, a blog post, and a rack card. In many cases, throughout the groups, documentaries were referenced for information participants based their thoughts and opinions on. Three main themes emerged from this portion of the discussion including "transparency," "attractive information," and "information desired."

A common theme that surrounded transparency was "trust." Particularly when it came to the communication material provided, the groups liked the idea of "transparency," but did not see it in all the material provided. Some sources were more trusted than others were. For example, one participant said, "I would say that I immediately trusted the website much more than the video because the video was just, it was just too perfect and you could see how it could all, they could just take out the nice parts of the things and put it in the video." One participant said, "I like how they kind of market their transparency." The participants discussed that they were only "getting one side" of the information. Some participants thought the video was "too scripted" and "very forced" creating mistrust among the views. None of the groups trusted the video and the message being shared. Every group said the video had a nice design and was a "feel good" video; however, they said it was "sugarcoated," "glamorous," and "too perfect." The participants also stated the

video did not show enough of the actual “beef cattle.” A participant said, “There was no human interactions with them [the ranchers] and the animals.” One participant said the video was “perpetuating stereotypes” and gave viewers the “picture perfect” view of the cattle industry. Several of the participants mentioned the lack of “diversity” stating that there should be more “people of color,” and the participant could not “identify with the video” because they did not see anyone that looked like them in it.

At the end of each group sessions, the participants were asked what other information they would like to see regarding FCR and their practices. Themes that surrounded this topic were "treatment of the animals" and the "management practices" of ranchers. One participant said, "What they vaccinate with, what medicine they're cause they say they're vaccinated and they become healthy. Well, what do they do to make them healthy?" Another participant pointed out FCR “vaccinates” the cattle and wanted to know what “medicine” the ranchers are using. Another participant said they wanted to know “what they feed them.” One participant summed up the questions about “management practices” with this statement:

I think to elaborate on what methods they use cause they say like we do this and we do that, but there aren't any specifics. So, like what we talked about, the details that would be really helpful and like um you know what they do with the cows if they're really sick or if they just can't use them anymore and that stuff.

The participants also mentioned “transparency” again within this section of the conversation. One said, “I definitely think it’s better than their competitors. I would just like to see more transparency and facts.” Another participant addressed “the elephant in the room” and said, “I would like to hear more about the end process.” The “environmental effects” of beef production and human “health implications” were also brought up again as information participants wanted to know more about. One participant said they wanted to see a “quick video” about “their daily lives.” Other important factors included the price of the beef product and where to purchase it.

Conclusion and Implications

From a producer’s standpoint, understanding how the millennial generation responds to information related to beef the beef industry is vital to the future success of their operations (Beef, 2014). Participants from these focus groups were all a part of the millennial generation meaning their perceptions of the industry and their peers’ perceptions are important for those in the beef industry to hear. Millennials will continue to have a major influence on the products in demand. Understanding what this generation is looking for will aid the industry in making strides to please consumers. By understanding the perceptions of this generation, the industry will be able to tailor messaging to fit the needs of the millennial consumer generation.

Health implications were a major concern for the participants of this study. It was one of the main, if not the number one factor they consider when deciding whether to purchase beef products. Participants felt as though they were receiving contradictory information from the beef industry when viewing the communication material provided. Participants are curious about both the positive and negative aspects of human health implications.

According to Rumble and Buck (2013), the public is somewhat knowledgeable about livestock production; however, a knowledge gap exists between producers and consumers. Their study suggested that while consumers have some knowledge, their perceptions and justifications for their beliefs are sometimes inaccurate (Rumble & Buck, 2013). The results of this research imply

millennial consumers lack knowledge of the beef industry as a whole. The knowledge gap between producers and consumers is a result of where they get their information from and the type of media they are consuming. The participants gained most of their industry knowledge from documentaries that only present one side of the argument.

Communication outreach is essential to the success of the beef industry on a state and national level. Consumers need to be educated on what cattle ranching is. Participants of this study recommended going out into the community to schools, community events, and even grocery stores in order to educate consumers about the industry. They also mentioned reaching consumers via social media through different types of media including videos and photographs. The participants wanted to see transparency from the industry for every step of the process from the ranching to the processing. Education can begin at the most basic level of showing consumers the difference between dairy cattle and beef cattle. The education can also reach farther into the industry, by sharing breeds that do better in the Florida climate and other management practices that ranchers are doing to take care of their cattle.

Agricultural communicators within the industry should consider social media and blogs as a form of communication outreach to the millennial generation specifically. The participants liked hearing from the rancher when it came to the blog, but they were hesitant to believe the video. Millennials are consuming media via social media and even get their news from platforms like Twitter and Facebook. Communicators should also consider a documentary campaign or miniseries that could be aired on platforms like Facebook or Netflix. According to the participants of this study, schools are showing documentaries featuring one side of the story, but not telling the rancher's side. Participants are also looking to these documentaries as sources of trusted information causing their mistrust of the beef industry. It is also important to reach community leaders and influencers as the "bandwagon" effect can affect the way the public views the beef industry.

Participants did not feel much of a connection to the FCR video because they did not see people that looked like them, they thought it was too perfect, and they did not see the entire process that the ranchers were discussing. According to Petty and Cacioppo (1986), the more an individual feels connected to an issue the more likely they will be to process the issue-relevant arguments within the information presented. In order for the participants to process the video or other material, they needed to feel some sort of connection to it. Participants felt a connection to the rack card in particular because it said "tour a ranch near you," showing that they processed this information and liked it.

Participants' main call to action for FCR was more transparency. Participants picked up on the word "transparency" utilized within the FCR communication material and discussed how they wanted more of it in the form of videos, facts, and photographs. The same is seen in a study conducted by Goodwin (2013) where it was found that transparent communication and perceived transparency had a significant impact on participants' attitudes. The study also found that a lack of transparency within communication could have a significant impact on the elaboration consumers exhibit concerning agricultural messaging. The organization makes claims of transparency, which is seen in some of their communication material, but not enough. FCR needs to show the day-to-day side of cattle ranching by producing videos and photographs that document both the hard times as well as the good times. Participants found some of their communication to be unrealistic, which is a call for education as well as action. Presenting their ranchers on a day-to-day level by interviewing them on video in one way to engage the millennial generation. Another way to engage this generation is to find other ways for them to hear from the ranchers

such as a blog or social media posts. Participants also recommended that the organization stay consistent with their labeling, logos, and social media in order for them to be easily recognizable.

Participants noted that the video did not show any actual cattle handling. While they viewed it as a promotional piece, every group agreed that it was too perfect and seemed to be scripted. The video is also not as diverse as far as ethnicity; one way to fix this would be to add people of different backgrounds who work in the industry to the video. The women were also noted as dainty and the stereotypical rancher's wife, one way to combat this view would be to show more cowgirls working with cattle.

The video also shied away from talking about the processing of the cattle and participants would have rather heard them discuss the process in order to build their trust in the organization. Participants wanted to see footage from each step of the process. The processing of cattle is a controversial issue that FCR could utilize a promotional or educational video to help consumers understand. FCR should further investigate the potential of adding a processing piece to their video or creating an educational video dedicated to their particular process.

Participants generally had skeptical and negative perceptions of both the national and state beef industries. However, they did view Florida as less of a "corporate" landscape for farming. In regards to "transparency," participants expressed a preference for it with their skepticism of humane industry practices. FCR would benefit from creating communication pieces that showed every aspect of the industry from ranching to processing.

Communication outreach is vital to the success of the beef industry on the state and national levels. In order to accomplish the outreach, different types of media, agriculture communicators and legislators should be employed. Transparency is the major theme that should be taken from this study, especially for FCR. Participants expressed their desire to know more and see more of what the ranchers are doing and this can be accomplished through their communication material.

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