SPENT five years on the Rosebud Indian Reservation in South Dakota. There are many wonderful things that I miss and love hearing about. While this is not a great place to raise a kid, there are some hard workers and individuals volunteering countless hours to change the destiny of the Rosebud youth. Consequently, you would think that if a celebrity such as Bob Barker were going to donate millions of dollars to philanthropy, the youth of his nation would have his undivided attention. This, however, would be a wrong cause. Unquestionably.

On the Rosebud Reservation, there is a lack of opportunity rate, and it is consistently recognized as one of the 10 poorest counties. If you were to tour the South Dakota, Todd County ranks at the bottom of the list for per capital income. Many of the kids are hooked on drugs, and 12-year-old girls are having babies.

Violent crime is five times greater than the state average, typically because of drugs. Rosebud tribal members have a 70% higher death rate due to alcohol and 210% due to homicide. While the average American enters the working life at 57 years, the lifespan of a Rosebud Sioux tribal member is only 57 years.

What about this community — or the world — be without the U.S. beef industry? Well, hungry, for one thing. American cattle producers produce 25 billion pounds of beef a year, and we consume it at an average rate of 66 lb. per capita annually. Beef fills the government’s definition of a “power food,” delivering a concentrated package of essential nutrients, including high-quality protein, zinc, iron and B vitamins. It is because of the efficiency and effectiveness of our agricultural producers that we get to eat well and affordably. Expenditures for meat in this country represent a smaller percentage of disposable income than anywhere else in the world (just 1.9% for all red meat in 2005). Without animal agriculture, our diets, health and finances would all suffer.

There would also need to be a tremendous volume of alternative raw materials redirected. Recognizing the many valuable co-products that come from the beef industry, the half of a slaughter animal’s liveweight is directed to uses other than human food. An obvious example is leather. Without the beef industry, what materials (probably petroleum based) would be needed to replace the leather going from 33 million cattle hides into clothing, footwear, upholstery and sporting goods every year?

The rendering industry also provides vast amounts of ingredients to pet food manufacturers. Fats and proteins are used in pet foods as dry ingredients or as rendered liquid ingredients such as crayons, insulin, deodorant, antifreeze, asphalt and cosmetics. A wide range of beef byproducts are essential for the manufacture of numerous pharmaceuticals. On the flip side, the cattle industry serves as a major recycler of byproducts from other industries. Cattle convert the gross nutrients found in these potential waste streams into valuable products and keep them out of landfills.

A key example would be distillers dried grains (DDG). In the mid-20th century, the U.S. ethanol industry had the capacity to produce 5% of total fuel ethanol annually. That is accompanied by roughly 40 million tons of DDG, and this industry is expected to double in the near term. With the current value of DDG in fiber form, ruminant animals have a key role to play in keeping up with the ever-increasing demand for just this one byproduct.

Similarly, cattle production allows conversion of pasture and rangeland into products beneficial to human consumption. More than one-quarter of the U.S. landmass is some sort of grassland or range, providing numerous materials that monogastrics cannot digest. As I once heard a speaker point out, grazing is the original “LISA” (low-impact sustainable agriculture). Cattle grazing operations can actually be more than low impact, and they can lead to significant positive improvements through grassland management.

Cattle producers actively care for their grazing resources, and they have both a vested interest in long-term health and productivity of the forage and an interest in the ecological health of local conditions. The other side of beef production — feeding — also yields net environmental benefits. When we utilize concentrated food production practices, additional acres are freed for other uses, including conservation. It is also important to note the impact the beef industry has on our local and national economies. According to the U.S. Department of Agriculture, cattle generated roughly $49.6 million of gross revenue in 2006. That’s a lot of zeroes, but what is more important is that many of those dollars came into local economies where the multiplier effect — the “indirect and induced economic activity” stimulated by cash inflow — is significant for agricultural income.

So, the next time you hear or read of yet another attack on the industry, just picture that white hat on your head, and keep doing what you are doing.

* * * * * * *

Loos Tales

July 9, 2007

People are human beings, too

By CATHY BANDYK*

SOMETIMES, I feel that we in the beef message feel like we are being outvoted by our most popular cause of the day, some activist has managed to get into the news. When that happens, we communicate effectively from a defensive position and almost impossible to battle with emotion.

Do I have you riled up? Angry? Depressed? All the least common reasons their toll on us as individuals and as an industry. Let’s not waste this opportunity for us to truly be the good guys — in the production of safe, wholesome, plentiful food, in stewardship of our natural resources and in our contributions to the local and national economy.

By the way, the names and titles proclaiming “affiliated with it. People are human beings, too — or the world — be without animals.

Loss Tales

July 9, 2007

People are human beings, too