

Cattle Business in Mississippi – March 2016
“Beef Production Strategies” article
Spring Forward with Beef Advocacy

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All round Starkville, the first signs of spring are abundant! February was really a great month! I am still overwhelmed by the Dixie Nationals. Not only did it showcase our state’s hardest working youth and some of our best livestock, to me, it showcased Mississippi’s commitment to the future of agriculture. After Dixie, we spent several days at Producer Advisory meetings to determine Extension programming for the 2017 Plan of Work. As March comes and goes, my first year at Mississippi State will have come full circle. With March comes the Annual BCIA meeting, the bull sale at Hinds Community College, Beef 101, the Fed Beef Challenge, Spring AI. School, and six Farm Animal Welfare trainings for the law enforcement community. I am definitely looking forward to my first opportunity to vote as a Mississippi resident on March 8th. However, I am most excited about March 13th, when we ‘spring forward’ with daylight savings time.

Many counties across the state are begging to implement the Beef Advocacy program this month. The Beef Advocacy Program will empower producers to engage in conversations with consumers about the health and safety of beef in a balanced diet. Producers will learn about beef choices, (grass-fed, grain-fed, natural, organic, etc.), environmental stewardship, animal rights vs. animal welfare, and sustainability. We hope at the completion of this program, a producer will be better equipped to answer the questions and address the concerns of their non-farming friends, co-workers, and acquaintances. While this program’s intentions are to cover all four sections to the same audience, each section can be used as a standalone presentation for a county cattlemen’s meeting.

- The first section of the Beef Advocacy program addresses the many choices of beef. Consumers have a host of options and labels to consider every time they visit the meat counter. This section will address the differences between labels such as organic and natural, explain the differences in the USDA Quality Grading System, and discuss how beef fits into a healthy diet.
- The Beef Safety section covers the checks and balances that beef goes through from the pasture to the plate. Information from the Food Safety and Inspection Service details the rigorous process of inspection at the slaughter facility. This section also details the use of growth promoting implants, antibiotics, and beta agonists in the beef industry.
- Beef in the Environment demonstrates how beef is a sustainable product. Using peer-reviewed, published research, the beef industry has documented that we are on a path for continuous improvement in sustainability. This section will teach producers how they can capitalize on opportunities to increase sustainability and show consumers the amounts of improvement that our industry has experienced.
- The last section of the program covers important issues and revolves around hot topics in animal welfare. As new hot topics hit the news this section will be continuously updated. I foresee this section as being used for talks in ag classes, cattlemen meetings, and 4-H club meetings.

Getting the correct message to our consumers begins with empowering our producers with knowledge. This program should encourage producers to engage in the Masters of Beef Advocacy (MBA) program sponsored by the Beef Checkoff. The MBA program provides engaging

correspondence on top industry issues. I hope that you will consider utilizing all or part of the Beef Advocacy Program tools in your county this year. I hope your spring is off to a great start!

If you would like to contact me, my email address is cobie.rutherford@msstate.edu and phone is [662-325-4344](tel:662-325-4344).

For more information about beef cattle production, contact an office of the Mississippi State University Extension Service.