



NATIONAL MEAT ASSOCIATION

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Statement by Rosemary Mucklow Director Emeritus, National Meat Association USDA/DOJ Livestock Competitive Workshop Fort Collins, CO - August 27, 2010

My name is Rosemary Mucklow. I am Director Emeritus of National Meat Association. Thank you for allowing me to present.

I have been associated with the meat industry for almost half a century. I want to tell you that the greatest successes I have observed over that time have occurred where there have been partnerships between producers and packers. Those partnerships have led to better products and expanded sales to consumers, our most important customers

In the 1960s, the livestock and meat industry went through huge structural changes that were the death knell for the large stockyards and old slaughter plants close to metropolitan areas. These old facilities were replaced by slaughter and processing facilities in the countryside that produced chilled, vacuum packed cuts of beef, pork and lamb, extending the shelf life from less than ten days for swinging carcasses to an astonishing three to four weeks.

Livestock producers were no longer nameless individuals whose animals were dispatched on a truck to a market and sold on the average to a nameless buyer representing an old-line packer. Because the new packing plants were in rural areas, producers began partnering with packers to provide specific characteristics and livestock traits, which would then provide marketing advantages all the way to the retail store and the restaurant. These partnering programs led to dedicated branded programs such as Certified Angus Beef, and parallel programs for pork and lamb.

The partnerships developed ways to put meat on the table of today's consumers, who spend a lot less time preparing family meals than their mothers and grandmothers did.

Over these 50 years, I have had a ring-side seat watching history being made! I have seen producers and packers working together in partnerships, using contracts that ensure that each can make a reasonable living in a very competitive industry. Together they have done a superb job meeting the expectations of the consumer, at the retail store, and in the restaurant.

I am especially proud of the way that National Meat Association members, both large and small firms, have partnered with producers to develop programs tailored to specific consumer expectations, including their expressed interest in leaner cuts of meat, cuts that can be prepared quickly for families, and special interest in niche markets like organic, “never-ever”, source verified, grass fed, and others. We are proud to count as members entrepreneurial firms like Meyer Natural Angus, Laura’s Lean, Niman Ranch, Tallgrass Beef, Panorama Beef, Maverick Ranch, Coleman Natural, Carlton Farms, Creekstone Farms, Superior Farms, Morgan Ranch, and on and on!

Today, I am proud of the fact that many of the entrepreneurs in this industry are members of NMA and we have been and continue to be a major resource for them to help them achieve their entrepreneurial dreams.

The major reason for the success of these partnerships is that they are based on trust and fairness between the parties – they sit down together, and ensure standards are met by agreed-upon third party audits. Both the producer and the packer are winners at delivering the meat the consumer wants and expects.

With all that is good in the meat industry, there is one thing that I still fail to understand, and that is the attitude of some producers and producer organizations that the packers are the enemy. There is no place in this industry for an Enemies List, and people who think we can best serve the consumer by setting the producer against packer are following a pied piper, who will only lead to economic destruction.

Finally, USDA is also a partner in these efforts, and most recently has added one more innovative and accessible feature to its Market News web site by providing a “dashboard” where livestock sellers and buyers can quickly find out the current price and transaction information for cattle. I hope the producers at this workshop are using this. USDA will be adding similar information for other species. Thank you Ag Marketing Service.

The greatest successes I have observed over the past half century have occurred with partnerships between producers and packers. Let's build on the success of these partnerships in expanding and meeting consumer demand for red meat. If producers and packers continue to work together, the future is bright. If we think that a new layer of government intervention can benefit some at the expense of others, we are bound to fail.

National Meat Association is a non-profit trade association. Since 1946, NMA has represented meat packers and processors, equipment manufacturers and food suppliers who provide services to the meat industry. The association has members throughout the United States, as well as in Canada, Australia and Mexico.