

Open Pastures

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Livestock Grazing--Only Alternative to Stop Desertification, Says Holistic Management Expert

By Marilyn Bay Wentz, Editor

Allan Savory, president and founder of the Savory Institute, spent a day with livestock producers at the AGA's Ranch Day June 23. The event, which included lecture, a ranch tour on foot, and plenty of interaction opportunities, was held east of Denver at the Flying B Bar Ranch owned by Brad and Margaret Buchanan.

Savory has demonstrated tremendous success across the globe by advising ranchers and other land managers on his system of holistic management. His methods are employed on land from Africa to the Americas and everywhere in between. He has worked with managers of both private and public land.

He opened the AGA Ranch Day with the statistic that "only 18 percent of the world's land is arable, while two-thirds of it is grassland." He also clearly and repeated

stated that he is not a proponent of rotational grazing but rather "planned management." Ranch day attendees included a combination of seasoned proponents of Savory's holistic management to those with only periphery knowledge of it.

Following his opening lecture and some question and answer time, participants walked into the pastures of the Flying B Bar Ranch. Host Brad Buchanan expectantly stated that he would like to reduce the amount of cheatgrass in his pasture. Rather than advise him straight away, Savory asked the audience what it would do about the cheatgrass. This pattern followed as the walking tour continued. In most scenarios, Savory recommended increasing the herd size in order to keep the ground covered and aid in the biological decomposition of trampled grass by the feces and urine left from the concentrated herd grazing.

His comments were received with knowing nods from those experienced in holistic management,



AGA Board member and Ranch Day host Brad Buchanan (far right) explains his land management challenges at his Flying B Bar Ranch, north of Strasburg, Colo. Allan Savory (seated on log) listens during the AGA Ranch Day, June 23.

while the newbies, myself included, found themselves scratching their heads. I had my interest piqued but felt frustrated with the

continued on page 10

Inside This Issue

Board & Staff Contacts	2
Speaking Out	3
Producer Profile: Princess Beef	4
Across the Nation	6-7
Legally Speaking--Food Safety	8-9
Advertising Rates & Specs	11
Marketing--Janice Neitzel	12

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Farm Branding on Menus and Packaging Important

By Janice Neitzel, Sustainable Solutions Group

Traceability is a fancy word that tells me about my food and how it's grown. I want traceability in the foods I buy when shopping and when choosing a restaurant, especially for meat, milk, and eggs. Apparently, so do a lot of other people. Recent studies are revealing the details on what consumers want to see, and the news is good for American Grassfed Association producers.

Consumers are willing to pay more for locally produced foods and want more sustainable food options according to the March 2014 Food Issues Trend Tracker Survey provided by Cone Communications. Food safety (93 percent) and nutritional value (92 percent) landed on top as the most important health and sustainability issues for those making food purchasing decisions. More than two-thirds of Americans chose other issues as significant transparency factors in their food purchasing decisions, including:

- 74 percent locally produced
- 69 percent animal welfare
- 65 percent protects and renews natural resources¹

Looking closer at the issue of "local," almost nine-out-of-10 Americans (89 percent) consider where a product is produced when making food purchasing decisions, and two-thirds (66 percent) say they would pay more for food that is produced close to home. Consumers noted that locally sourced food provides environmental, economic and health benefits and supporting local businesses (64 percent) was chosen as the primary reason for buying local.¹

Organic food sales are rising quickly, but according to Kontera, a firm that crunches numbers on internet search data to provide insights for brand marketers, more consumers are focusing on other criteria, such as whether the food they buy is locally-sourced. Measuring how often phrases are viewed online, including mobile devices, in March 2013, "organic food" was viewed 63 percent of the time versus 37 percent looking up "local food." Just a year later, inter-

est in "local food" has surpassed interest in "organic food," as 65 percent of online views are now on "local food" with only 35 percent on "organic food."²

I recently was in a fairly large Midwest town, dining out several nights with friends. When asked what type of food I prefer, I said grassfed, locally-grown and cage-free. Over the next few days we went to several great restaurants. The first night, as I scanned the menu, I saw vegetarian and gluten-free were marked on the menu, but no traceability indicated on the meat. The next night my friend assured me she was taking me to a place where everything was grassfed, locally-grown and cage-free. As I scanned the menu, I saw information on the chicken, but nothing else. The third night at another restaurant, I didn't see any traceability information on the menu, so as I typically do, I asked the server about the burgers. She told me the source and assured me they were grassfed. Based on other information I was able to gather, I was able to better surmise the origins of the food, but I can't help wondering why the restaurants made it so difficult for me to get the information I wanted.

Food industry research firm, Technomic has recently found that restaurants and foodservice providers are not appealing to consumers' sense of social responsibility nearly enough and should be using socially responsible buzzwords on menus and packaging. Nearly 60 percent of consumers polled (59 percent) rated "socially responsible" as an important factor when deciding what restaurant they will visit, followed by "serves meat and poultry raised without hormones or steroids" (58 percent), "serves free-range poultry and/or grass-fed beef" (45 percent) and "serves natural and organic menu items" (41 percent).³

Technomic concludes that there are many missed opportunities to provide information on how and where food was grown, if healthy and sustainable, to appeal to consumers' heightening sense of social responsibility.³ I like to see farms listed on menus and packaging, or at minimum, certifications, such as American Grassfed Association or Animal Welfare

Approved. On menus, traceability information can be listed per menu item or farms can be listed at the bottom of the menu from where meat, milk and eggs are sourced.

It is easy to say that it is up to the restaurant to decide whether to list traceability information, but American Grassfed Association producers should take the initiative to ensure they take advantage of every opportunity to advertise their farm and top quality products. I suggest producers make it part of the deal when selling to restaurants that the farm name be listed on the menu and that any American Grassfed Association or other certifications be listed. When packaging products, ensure the farm name is in the package design and use the American Grassfed Association logo to increase visibility. At farmers markets use large signs with farm name and the American Grassfed Association certification logo.

The American Grassfed Association logo is already respected. Why not turn it into a socially responsible buzzword phrase that consumers instantly recognize?

Sustainable Solutions Group guides top food industry decision makers to source higher welfare meat, dairy, and eggs using an innovative roadmap approach for more responsible sourcing over time and supporting farmers with better animal husbandry, such as AGA certified.

For more information, contact Janice Neitzel of Sustainable Solutions Group at Janice@SustSolutions.com or 708-926-5569. Or check out our website at www.SustSolutions.com.

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