



## Project Snapshot: Cattle Raiser Descriptors Study



**Date: January 13, 2010**

### **Background**

In 2009 the Issues and Reputation Management team began a project to develop holistic messages to use in communicating to consumers about beef production and the values of the men and women who raise cattle in the United States. Solid message platforms designed for response to specific issues such as nutrition, safety and environment already have been developed. The issue response messages are effective in shooting back. But the idea of holistic messages is to allow the industry to be proactive and to shoot first rather than shooting back.

The first step in the holistic message project was a series of focus groups. The focus groups were designed to engage consumers in discussion and develop and qualitatively test messages that can create shared values that we are doing the right thing and care about consumers, and help consumers see the American cattle industry as making a positive contribution to society.

Part of the focus group research focused on effective message delivery. Consumers are receptive to messages from people they feel they can trust so personalizing the industry is critical to building shared values and creating positive feelings about beef. This led to the question of how to personalize the people who raise cattle. In short, from the consumer perspective – who are we? What do we call ourselves? Who is trustworthy to consumers?

We engaged consumers in discussion of terms such as cowboys, cattle farmers, cattle ranchers, cattlemen and women, and beef producers. What became clear in the focus groups is that some names were more trustworthy than others and, in particular, consumers did not have very positive perceptions of the term beef producer, the most widely used term by which we describe ourselves within the industry.

### **Objective**

Focus groups are directional in nature and cannot be used to project that consumers in general think and feel the way those participating in focus groups do. Therefore, a quantitative study was developed to provide a statistical analysis of consumer reactions to a set of descriptors.

### **Methodology**

An online survey of 1,007 U.S. adults, 971 of whom were beef-eaters, was conducted in November 2009. Respondents were selected from a large panel of consumers and the sample was weighted to be representative of the U.S. population. The independent survey was conducted by IPSOS Public Affairs.

Each respondent was randomly presented with four cattle raiser descriptors (cattle farmer, cattle rancher, cattlemans, beef producer) along with a random set of 14 descriptive words. Half the descriptive words were positive such as American values, honest, trustworthy, credible, caring, and half were negative such as profit-oriented, industrial, factory farming, corporate. Each respondent was asked to select five descriptive words they felt best described each of the cattle raiser descriptors.

### **Major Insights**

Beef eaters generally have positive perceptions of the terms cattle farmer, cattle rancher and cattlemans but decidedly negative perceptions of beef producer. In addition, though non beef-eaters represented only about 4 percent of the sample, which is too small a group from which to make meaningful projections, looking at this group's ratings it is intuitively clear they aren't just

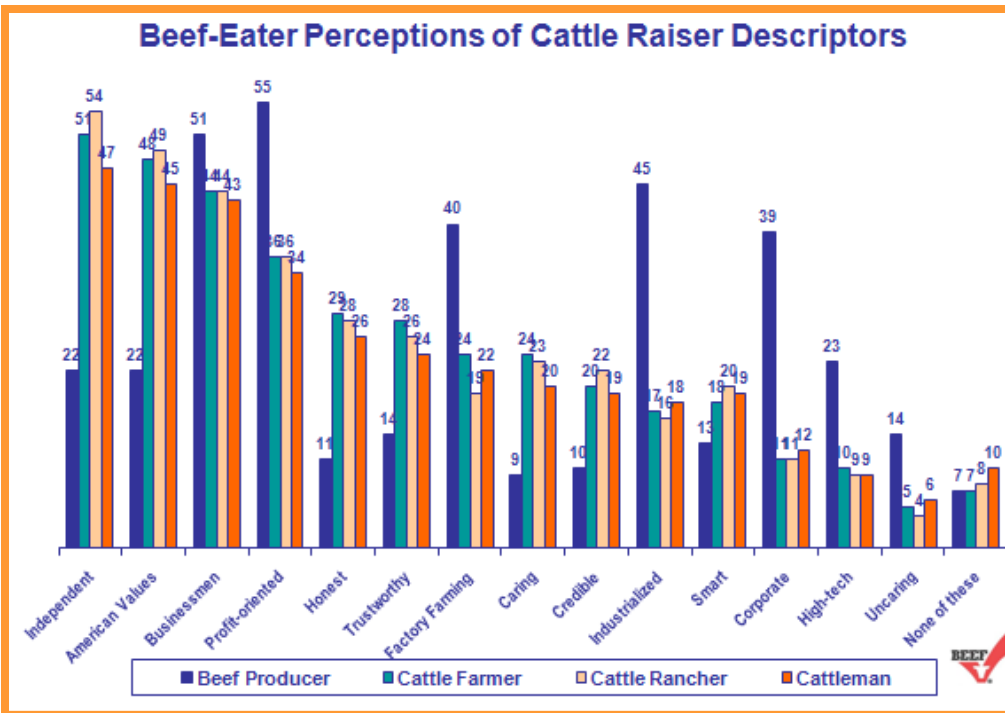


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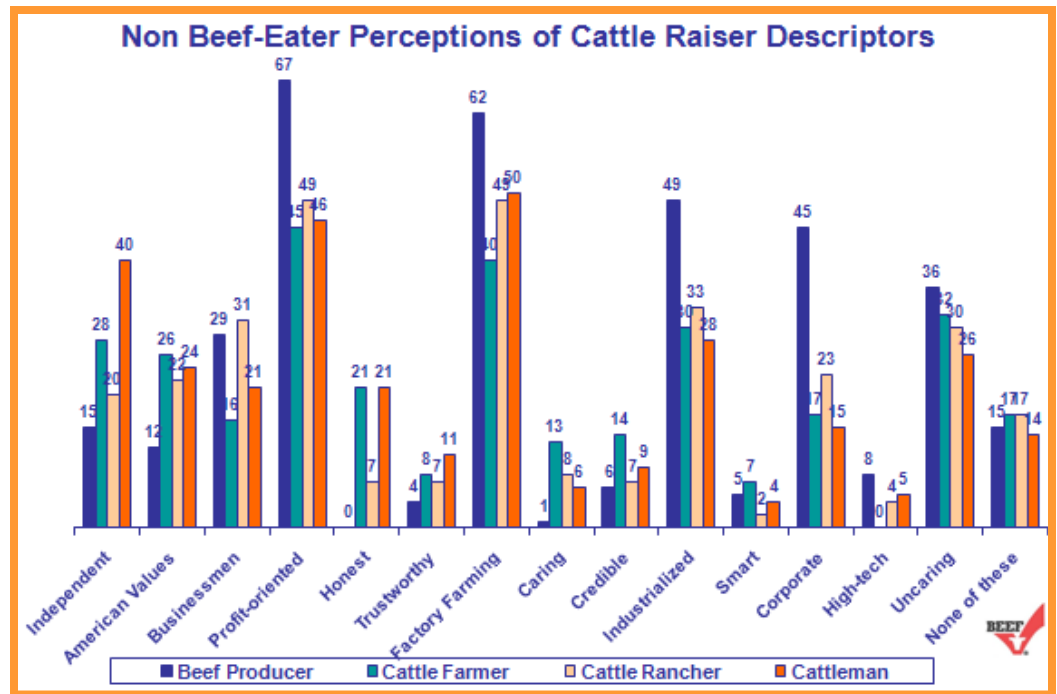
non beef-eaters, they are strongly anti-beef. Of interest, the Vegetarian Resource Group’s 2009 poll on vegetarianism estimates that three percent of Americans overall are vegetarian and 8 percent say they don’t eat meat so the 4 percent of the sample that were non beef-eaters may well represent these groups.

The chart below shows that, in ratings by beef-eaters, the term beef producer was significantly more likely to be

associated with the terms profit-oriented, factory farming, industrialized, corporate and high-tech. Beef producer was significantly less likely to be associated with the terms independent, American values, honest, trustworthy, caring, credible and smart. There were no significant differences in the ratings for cattle farmer, cattle rancher and cattleman all of whom were viewed positively.



Even the small group of non beef-eaters, who essentially gave every cattle raiser descriptor a negative rating, still singled out beef producer as the worst with that term being significantly more likely to be associated with the words profit-oriented, factory farming, industrialized, corporate and uncaring.



**Next Steps**

To share this information with industry communicators and work to ensure that consumer messages and consumer-facing information avoid using the term beef producers when talking about American cattle raisers.