Abstract

Interest in the welfare of cattle in the beef industry has intensified over time because of ethical concerns and varying societal perceptions that exist about the treatment and living conditions of farm animals. The definition of welfare will vary according to an individual’s philosophies (how one defines and prioritizes what is “good”), experiences (societal and cultural influences of animal roles and relationships), and involvement in the livestock industry (knowledge of how livestock operations work and why). Many welfare concerns in the beef industry could be mitigated by enhancing traditional husbandry practices that utilize practical improvements to alleviate or eliminate heat stress, pain from routine husbandry procedures, negative cattle handling, and the transitional effects of weaning, dry feeding, transportation, and comingling of calves. Recent concerns about the potential welfare effects of feeding technologies such as β-adrenergic agonists (BAA) have emerged and led to industry-wide effects, including the removal of a single BAA product from the market and the development of BAA-specific welfare audits. Altogether, the beef industry continues to be challenged by welfare issues that question a large range of practices, from traditional husbandry to newer technological advancements. As welfare awareness increases, efforts to improve livestock care and management must focus on scientific investigations, practical solutions, consumer perceptions, and educational tools that advance knowledge and training in livestock welfare. Furthermore, the future of beef cattle welfare must align welfare concerns with other aspects of sustainable beef production such as environmental quality, profitability, food safety, and nutritional quality.


The study reported here in this Research Brief was not funded by the beef checkoff, but is made available to expand the usefulness of this checkoff-funded website for those interested in beef sustainability.