

Industry Leaders Take Best Practices to the Next Level Summit Highlights Successes, Challenges in Beef Safety

DENVER (April 25, 2005) – Industry leaders convened at the Beef Industry Safety Summit held April 19 and 20 in Orlando, to discuss advancements in food safety, including the remarkable success in reducing the incidence of *E. coli* O157:H7. Participants updated the Beef Industry Food Safety Council (BIFSCo) Best Practices based on research and learnings since the documents were first developed.

Ongoing beef safety research is funded by America's Beef Producers through the \$1-per-head Beef Checkoff Program. The program is coordinated on behalf of the Cattlemen's Beef Board and state beef councils by the National Cattlemen's Beef Association (NCBA). The NCBA serves as one of the Beef Board's contractors for checkoff-funded programs.

Pathogens remain a primary focus for the beef industry and its consumers, but significant progress has been accomplished. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention recently announced that the overall incidence of *E. coli* O157:H7 infections declined 9.5 percent in 2004 alone. The number of infections has declined by 42 percent since the baseline was established from 1996 to 1998. In addition, USDA recently reported that the percentage of ground beef samples testing positive for *E. coli* O157:H7 declined by more than 80 percent since 2000, including a 43.3 percent year-over-year reduction between 2003 and 2004.

"These numbers show that the strategies put in place by the beef industry to fight *E. coli* are achieving remarkable results," said Roger West, a Florida cow-calf producer and current chair of the beef industry's Joint Research and Knowledge Management Committee.

West noted that these results already exceed the national goal of reducing incidences of *E. coli* O157:H7 to 1.0 per 100,000 people by 2010. "We've actually surpassed the national 'Healthy People 2010' goal well ahead of schedule," West said.

The keynote address was delivered by Elsa Murano, Ph.D., vice chancellor and dean of agriculture at Texas A&M University. Dr. Murano's reflected on her experience as the USDA undersecretary for food safety and shared her thoughts about recent food safety accomplishments. "The industry really rolled up its sleeves along with the USDA and, in partnership, really worked together to ensure that we were doing everything we could to keep beef safe. We are a model for the whole world, and I think it's that leadership displayed by the industry that really is what has gotten us to this point," said Elsa Murano, Ph.D.

BIFSCo – funded by beef producers with checkoff dollars – has been working toward compiling best practices from across the beef industry, which includes sharing safety strategies among competitors. BIFSCo best practices are available at www.bifsc.org. These are living documents that are updated and reviewed as scientific and technological advances are made.

While pathogen reduction strategies took center stage at the conference, other food safety issues were featured as well. The Issues Update Forum covered multi-drug resistant *Salmonella*, *Listeria monocytogenes*, dioxins, Johne's disease and FMD preparedness. Summit participants heard from presenters representing USDA-ARS, Department of Homeland Security, the Beef Information Center and Standard Meat Company.

Janice Huvve, Ph.D., of the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Agricultural Research Service discussed history of and research conducted on dioxins. Paula Fedorka-Cray, Ph.D., also of USDA-ARS explained the science behind multi-drug resistant pathogens and the importance of reducing *Salmonella* incidence. Nick Nickelson, Ph.D., chief executive for science and health for Standard Meat Company, shared research results and strategies to reduce foodborne listeriosis. Mark Klassen of the Beef Information Center provided an update on Johne's disease research

findings and John Martin, Ph.D., of the Department of Homeland Security briefed the group on FMD preparedness planning.

"I am truly impressed with the kind of interaction that takes place between all segments of the beef industry to help progress the safety of beef to an even higher standard," said Bo Reagan, Ph.D., NCBA vice president of research and knowledge management. "In that respect, this year's conference was a tremendous achievement."

Funded by beef producers with checkoff dollars, BIFSCo brings together representatives from all sectors of the beef industry – including cow/calf producers, feedlot operators, packers, processors, retailers and foodservice operators – to battle the industry's most complex food safety issues together.