364 Branded Beef Program Response to COVID-19.

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Travel halted. Consumer habits changed. Marketing strategies adjusted. Restaurants closed. Future projections deleted. All of this occurred in the food industry, and many others like it, once COVID-19 spread. As the leading brand of Angus beef, it shifted what it needed to in order to offer more support to its foodservice distribution, retail, restaurant and international partners. The Certified Angus Beef® brand's purpose has always been to promote high-quality beef brought to tables by family farmers and ranchers. While that still rings true, the pandemic has shed a light on how every link in the chain strengthens what those cattle caregivers do and what consumers have come to expect.

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360 Awardee Talk: The evolution of meat flavor measurement and its importance to the livestock industry.

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Meat flavor is part of the trilogy of traits that determine taste: tenderness, juiciness, and flavor. For meat, juiciness is influenced by the amount of intramuscular fat and moisture that is retained during the cooking process. Meat tenderness is primarily determined by the amount and type of connective tissue, degree of protein degradation, and muscle sarcomere length. Tenderness has been managed genetically in livestock, with significant strides being made to reduce the number of steaks rated tough. The last factor that influences consumers' perception of meat taste is flavor and aroma. Compared to juiciness and tenderness, flavor is much more complex, as it is influenced by lipids and water-soluble compounds that serve as precursors to meat flavor. These precursors are then developed into flavor and aromas during the cooking process. Flavor is measured by consumers via sensing on the tongue, trigeminal senses, and volatile aroma compounds and is largely variable from one consumer to the next. Objectively measuring flavor is much more complicated than either juiciness or tenderness and requires either a highly-trained human sensory panel or expensive, highly-sensitive equipment. The development of the beef flavor lexicon in 2011 provided a comprehensive list of beef flavor descriptors with objective references for each and anchors along a scale of 0 to 15, allowing a trained sensory panel to objectively measure and score the flavor descriptors. Gas and liquid chromatography coupled with mass spectroscopy objectively measure volatile aroma compounds and flavor precursors, respectively. Now the use of "omics" techniques have been adapted to flavor research to help relate protein, lipids, and other metabolites with flavor characteristics. Meat flavor is what most appeals to consumers and sets it apart from plant proteins. Furthermore, flavor serves as the guardrails to keep a premium marketability on track and is something that the livestock industry has that makes their product unique and desirable.