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NEW DEMANDS ON BEEF PRODUCTS

Jim Coakley
Coleman Natural Beef
Sterling, Colorado

The natural beef business is founded on the idea of providing food products that are an alternative to commonplace and are inherently high quality. A brand that is built on trust of the company and its suppliers to produce food products using specified raising practices that measure up to what the consumer desires and believes to be best for family and planet. In 1989 the company wrote a mission statement that said:

By understanding our customers we will lead in the profitable marketing of natural and organic products using ecologically focused principles.

The fundamentals that Mel Coleman and his family focused on in 1979 upon founding the company was that the product needed to be safe it needed to taste good, it needed to be good for you and it needed to be raised right.

At the urging of Mel Coleman USDA created the Natural classification of beef in 1980 making Coleman the first USDA certified Natural beef producer.

Today Coleman natural foods represent a group of the nation's premier meat and poultry companies. The red meat division is made up of a slaughter plant in Limon, Colorado, a fabrication plant in Denver, Colorado and a slaughter and fabrication plant in Childress, Texas formerly known as B3R Country Meats. The company has grown from a beef company to include pork, lamb, bison, poultry, sausage and prepared foods. All species raised without antibiotics added hormones on an all-vegetarian diet.

From the beginning Coleman has had a managed process that was source verified and traceable through the Pre-Approved supplier and affidavit program.

Under current UDSA guidelines the definition of natural says it "Contains no artificial ingredients. Minimally processed". As more consumers differentiate the products within natural category one would think that USDA would adopt a stricter standard. One reason being that claims vary between brands.

The next change coming into focus in the beef business is recognition of organic raising practices. USDA regulates each aspect of raising and processing meat products. Organic practices are verified through third party certification. Coleman currently accepts animals certified by any certifying agency recognized by USDA.

The current procedure to enroll cattle into the Coleman program includes the Pre-Approved supplier form required by USDA that indicates the producer has knowledge of the protocol to raise natural animals for the Coleman program, followed by the affidavit that verifies that the protocol has been followed on a specific set of cattle. If the animals are raised to slaughter weight at a feedlot separate from where the cattle were born the feedlot operation is educated to understand the natural raising protocol and is audited annually to assure procedures are being followed. In a nutshell animals never receive antibiotics, therapeutic or non-therapeutic injected or administered in the feed or water. No added hormones or synthetic growth promoters injected, implanted and/or administered in the feed or water. 100% vegetarian

diet...no animal by-products or animal fats; no poultry litter. Treated animals identified and removed. Recently certain retailers are requiring third party audits to back up claims that are being marketed through the grocers. One document that is being requested by the auditors is a standard operating procedure. It is suggested that producers take time to set down and write out a simple statement of their operating procedure. This will prove to be beneficial in the event the producer is asked to explain how they verify the raising practices on their farm or ranch.

Also becoming more important is a good identification system. There are several animal ID systems available. Each one has its own recording system that accompanies it. Information that will be most beneficial to Coleman will be the same information being sought after by USDA. The main difference being a definite recorded date to indicate the age of the animal and the fact that it has or has not received an antibiotic. The system that is the most attractive to Coleman at the present time is a tag system known as Animal Profiling International, LLC. This particular tag has read and write capability at or near the same cost. The difference being the animal carries all the needed information within the tag. To get more details contact Bruce Hoffman, who is the president of that company. (See the speaker for details.).

In that Coleman is a beef company they purchase slaughter weight cattle. This is accomplished through a network of feedlots and farmer feeders. Coleman exposes cattle offered as calves or yearlings to its cooperating feeding companies and secures a contract from those individuals for the cattle as they reach slaughter weight. Roughly 40% of the cattle that Coleman slaughters come from retained owners. Coleman is usually securing prospects and contracting cattle six to nine months in advance of slaughter. The newest thing on the block is animal welfare. As consumers are becoming more aware of how the food supply is managed and regulated they are also more interested in how the animals are raised and cared for. To maintain and grow a niche market it is important to determine how to understand what it is that the consumer is looking for and define methods to supply them with the information. One way of doing this is through auditing certain criteria that the consumer is most concerned with. If the reader is interested visit http://www.wholefoodsmarket.com/issues/list_animalcompassion.html to read the latest draft of the Animal Compassionate program that Whole Foods is launching. Beef supplier animal welfare audits will serve to strengthen integrity by doing the right thing. (Being an open book) The focus will be:

- Cattle handling practises
- Nutrition, health and well-being.
- Facilities
- Documents and Records
- Farmer Feeder and Feedlots
- Rangeland and pastures.
- Automatic Failure Issues.

Following is a form that is used for this purpose. The notes have not been deleted to help clarify the auditor's rationale.

SECTION 1: HANDLER PRACTICES and CATTLE HANDLING		Points Available		Points Earned	
1.1	<p>Is cattle marking performed properly? (potential automatic fail) Comments:</p> <p><u>Cattle are marked by ear tag and brand. Brand is only applied to cows and replacement heifers. No abusive notching or mutilation was observed to mark cattle.</u></p>	50	0	50	
1.2	<p>If dehorning/debudding is performed, is it done to correct parameters? Comments: <u>Dehorning was not practiced as a routine procedure. Dehorning/tipping was practiced only when necessary to remove ingrown horn, for example. Cow with in-grown horn was observed during audit. Manager was encouraged to remove the tip in more of a timely manner before growth back into the skull occurs.</u></p>	50	20	0	50
1.3	<p>Is branding performed properly? Comments: <u>Branding was performed immediately after birth. Approximate hot brand contact with hide of young calf is 2 to 3 seconds. Branding procedure was not observed. Manager was interviewed to discover procedure for branding.</u></p>	30	20	0	20
1.4	<p>Is castration performed correctly and early? Comments: <u>Banding method is the procedure used. This is accomplished with in the first day of life for the calf.</u></p>	50		0	50
1.5	<p>Is electric prod use minimized and kept within parameters? Comments: <u>Electrical prod is used only in response to problem animal then put away (prod use not observed). Cattle dog and good handling practices utilizing animal instincts were used.</u></p>	30		0	30
1.6	<p>Do cattle exit the squeeze chute at a walk or trot? Comments: <u>Squeeze chute is rarely used at this farm. Processing calves is performed in the field immediately after birth. Operation of chute was not observed.</u></p>	30	20	0	NA

1.7	Do cattle vocalize while in lead up or entering the squeeze chute? Comments: <u>Operation was not observed.</u>	30		0	NA
1.8	Is medical treatment given when needed? Comments: <u>Yes, a log is kept. Sick or lame animals are quarantined if needed. No animals were observed to need medical attention that were denied that attention.</u>	50		0	50
1.9	Is euthanasia performed correctly with consideration to sound animal welfare practices? Comments: <u>Process described by the manager was that euthanasia was enacted when the animal condition was irreversible and suffering was evident. This was performed by putting the animal to sleep by drug then gunshot.</u>	50		0	50
1.10	Are calves weaned at appropriate times and by appropriate method? Comments: <u>By interview with the manager, the procedure used is force weaning by complete and immediate removal from the mother and shipment to feed lot. While this is effective, the manager was encouraged to incorporate techniques such as fence line or other technique that accomplishes the task with the least amount of stress on the animal.</u>	30		0	0
1.11	Are ranch hands/cattle handling personnel competently trained and using proper handling techniques? Comments: <u>The owner of the operation, his children and the dog are the primary animal handling team for the farm. Through interview and observance correct and innovative techniques were observed.</u>	50	20		50
Total Points Available / Total Points Earned			390		350

SECTION 2: NUTRITION, HEALTH AND WELL-BEING		Points Available			Points Earned
2.1	<p>Are cattle clean? Comments:</p> <p><u>Yes, the cattle were found to be clean. On a 0 to 4 grade scale the animals were a 0 (totally clean).</u></p>	30	15	0	30
2.2	<p>Do animals show conditions of cancer eye, emaciation, bald patches (lice), grubs, lameness other disease conditions? Comments:</p> <p><u>No, cattle were observed to have advanced cancer eye or severely emaciated. Individuals that showed signs of abnormality/weakened condition were cared for in a timely manner.</u></p>	50		0	50
2.3	<p>Do cattle have good body condition (rating on standard 9 point scale)? Comments:</p> <p><u>The average body condition for the herd was a 7. The cattle were very healthy</u></p>	50	25	0	50
2.4	<p>Are clean water / troughs provided and provided in required amount for herd size? Comments:</p> <p><u>Clean, self-filling water stations were provided at adequate number and amount of water for the herd size.</u></p> <p><u>The recommendation was to use fill dirt to build up the worn ground around the water station inspected at the old elk ranch.</u></p>	20	10	0	20
2.5	<p>If natural water sources are used, is testing performed periodically for wholesomeness? Comments:</p> <p><u>Water was periodically tested for nitrates.</u></p>	10		0	10
2.6	<p>Does feed contain proteins derived from animal sources? Comments:</p> <p><u>Natural grazing and supplementation of calves 2 weeks prior to transfer to feed lot with silage is the feeding regimen for the herd. No animal source proteins are used.</u></p>	50		0	50
Total Points Available / Total Points Earned		210			210

SECTION 3: FACILITIES (FENCES, PENS, SHELTER, CORRALS and LOADING AREAS)		Points Available			Points Earned
3.1	Do cattle have protection from extreme weather conditions of wind and winter? <u>Creek bottoms and bluffs were present to break strong winds for the animals.</u>	40		0	40
3.2	Is heat relief provided? Comments: <u>There were no issues of heat stress observed during the audit. No shelter was available at this time, however, none was needed. The auditor emphasized to the manager that a plan should be in place to reduce stress related to heat should such conditions arise at the ranch.</u>	40		0	40
3.3	Is non-slip flooring/ground provided for cattle in all loading areas? Are general flooring areas of holding and loading in good condition? Comments: <u>Flooring in holding areas consisted of dirt. These would not present a slip hazard. See recommendations for repair of minor issue.</u>	20	10	0	20
3.4	Are corrals, pens and holding areas maintained so that there are no areas of standing water? Comments: <u>There were no areas of standing water.</u>	20	10	0	20
3.5	Are gates and fences maintained so as not to cause injury to animals? Comments: <u>Wires with ends sharp/not bent back or tape were used to secure gates. Hog panels with sharp ends exposed should be eliminated. Fences at the old elk pasture are slated to be torn down however there are holes and damaged places that were noted that may be an injury hazard for a playful and curious calf.</u>	20	10	0	10
Total Points Available / Total Points Earned		140			130

SECTION 4: DOCUMENTS AND RECORDS		Points Available			Points Earned
4.1	Is the Farm Plan (Standard Operating Procedures) written? Comments: <u>The SOP for the ranch was not developed. It should include procedures for feeding, feed content (feed label will suffice), animal handling training/policy, medical treatment of animals, quarantine, processing procedures, euthanasia contingency/when to implement, and bio-security.</u>	50	40 30 20 10	0	0
4.2	Is a log kept of medical treatment or morbidity log (animal, condition, medication, dosage, duration of quarantine from the herd, etc.)? Comments: <u>Medical treatment was kept in a day planner-type log. The information that was included was date, animal, drug and dosage.</u>	20		0	20
4.3	Is mortality log kept (animal, reason for death)? Comments: <u>Mortality was recorded with record of animals.</u>	20		0	20
4.4	Is there a self-audit program in place? Comments: <u>A formalized self-audit program was not in place.</u>	20		0	0
4.5	Is animal traceability in place? Comments: <u>Animals were traced through the process by ear tag by the number/letters linked to mother.</u>	20		0	20
4.6	Is training of animal handlers recorded? Comments: <u>The animal handling policy and procedures were not defined and documented, however it was evident that good policies and practices were in place.</u>	20	10	0	10
Total Points Available / Total Points Earned			150		70

SECTION 5: FARMER FEEDER AND FEEDLOTS		Points Available			Points Earned
5.1	Are the cattle accustomed to handling? Assess this at the points of handling in confined areas. Comments:	30	15	0	NA
5.2	Are cattle given enough space in the holding pens to exhibit social behavior and move freely? Comments:	20	10	0	NA
5.3	When bedding is used, is it changed between lots, kept fresh and clean? Comments:	20		0	NA
Total Points Available/Total Points Earned		70			NA

SECTION 6: RANCHES AND PASTURES		Points Available			Points Earned
6.1	When pasture or range grazing is limited due to weather conditions, is natural feed provided in amounts and manner to all animals eliminating competition? Comments: No deficiency was noted.	40		0	40
Total Points Available/Total Points Earned		40			40

SECTION 7: AUTOMATIC FAILURE/CRITICAL ISSUES		Yes/No
7.1	Deliberately running a SINGLE animal over a downed animal. Comments:	Pass, not observed.
7.2	Dragging a single sensible animal. Comments:	Pass, not observed.
7.3	Placing an electric prod or any object into sensitive part of a SINGLE animal. Comments:	Pass, not observed.
7.4	Maintaining animal(s) in poor health with obvious suffering (downed) withholding medical treatment or humane euthanasia. Comments:	Pass, not observed.

7.5	Use of animal derived proteins in cattle feed. Comments:	Pass, not observed.
7.6	Antibiotics without separation/distinction from natural or organic market herd (if applicable). Comments:	Pass, not observed.
7.7	Observance of any acts of abuse neglect (slamming gates on animals, hitting animals, etc). Comments:	Pass, not observed.
7.8	Any criteria that are indicated as automatic fail. Comments:	Pass, not observed.

Additional Comments and Recommendations:

- 1. Apply rubber padding on the stop bar crowd pen swing door to eliminate metal on metal banging.**
- 2. The loading chute at the homestead holding pens had one cleat missing. Repair this before use. All other areas were found to be satisfactory.**

