

**Submitted by: Kelly Loos to the High Plains Journal**

### **The future looks bright**

As I sat in the interview room, I couldn't help but hope that ten years down the road my own daughters would be so passionate, so well-spoken and so knowledgeable. But when the contest was over and I had time to really think about it, I realized who really needed to hear those interviews. The sixty-something farmers and parents, sitting out on the farm trying to discourage their kids and grandkids from choosing a career in agriculture are the ones who need to realize that a future in this industry has huge potential.

I had the humbling honor of spending a couple days in Austin, TX at the National Beef Ambassador competition. I was one of a four-member team of judges for the interview portion of the contest. These young people, representing twenty-four different states, were also judged on their oral presentations. The top three will earn scholarships and travel the country to share their wealth of knowledge with consumers and producers.

You might think it would be pretty easy to weed through the competitors as they sat across from us and tried to smile and maintain their composure through our barrage of questions. We honestly kept hoping for a couple of them to slip up but it just didn't happen. They were all so professional and so courteous and so sharp. But beyond that, they were passionate about the beef industry and you could see it in their eyes. You couldn't feel their sweaty palms as they reached across the table to shake our hands, you could only feel their strength and conviction, their desire to perpetuate and improve an industry that they are so proud of and one they love so deeply.

I really think the American National Cattlewomen have polished some rare gems with this program. These youngsters have experience in the industry, education about the nutrition of beef and food safety that I'm sure most producers don't have a clue about and the sincere belief that they can make a difference in the world by being a part of the livestock industry.

These young people came up with creative and realistic solutions to the challenges we threw out to them. Each candidate was reminded that 35% of all college students consider themselves to be vegans or vegetarians. We asked them how the industry should address this problem. Solutions included getting college food services to serve better beef dishes and simultaneously posting information about the benefits of beef in the diet in locations where co-eds could see it. Everyone agreed that more education was the key to getting out the message about the nutritional benefits of beef. These kids could rattle off the nutrients found in beef and their bioavailability faster than you can say ZIP... which, by the way, is the acronym for the Zinc, Iron and Protein found in beef! Did you know that? They all do!

It was incredible that these kids knew everything from the workings of HAACP to the breakdown of the Beef Board budget, but what was most impressive was the fact that these kids have passion and belief in a great future for the beef industry. Their messages

need to be heard by every nay-sayer and doom-and-gloom prophet in the business. These kids believe the beef industry is important to our national security and to our livelihood as a country and as freedom-loving people. Anybody in the industry that doesn't believe our food supply is a matter of national security and vital to our future, needs to spend some time with these young leaders.

Hearing them made me happy to be a part of the beef industry and made me so proud to have them representing me to the consumers of this country. I urge you to listen to what these kids have to say. They will make you proud too.

My kudos go out to the American National Cattlewomen and every one of the participants in this competition, even the ones who didn't make it to the nationals. If consumers don't buy beef after they hear from these kids, they sure won't buy beef from some grumpy old codger with dirty overalls and a bad attitude! We need to be thankful, grateful and proud that these kids are speaking for our industry.