

2007 Cattle Industry Annual Convention & Trade Show

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Going Natural

Forum explores growing market for natural and organic beef.

by **Miranda Reiman**

NASHVILLE, TENN. (Feb. 1, 2007) — “Natural” and “organic” have become buzz words in our industry, as a growing number of consumers have requested the products. The Issues Forum, “Natural/Organic Beef — What’s Happening in the Marketplace and What It Means to the Industry,” outlined who those consumers are and what companies are doing to meet their expectations.

Scott Eilert, vice president of the Cargill Meat Technology Development Center, focused on the need for greater regulations for defining natural. The company recommends three categories:

- ▶ a natural program that would be minimally processed with no solutions added;
- ▶ a naturally raised program with “no hormones and no antibiotics;” and
- ▶ an organic category.

Coleman Natural Meats sees more

opportunity in the natural business. Mel Coleman Jr. said he views natural as a fork-to-plate program that may include an animal-handling component in the future.

Going natural increased business and profit for Chipotle, a fast-food restaurant whose stated goal is to change how people think about fast food. Spokesman Chris Arnold says that even though most customers are unaware of their use of natural pork and chicken, a growing share of those who frequent the restaurant do so for those products.

After nearly three decades, a brand rooted in conventional beef production decided to enter the natural market. John Stika, president of Certified Angus Beef LLC, explained that the natural product line gives the brand a bigger presence in the retail case and caters to the niche of consumers demanding natural.

“Natural may not be mainstream, but who would have thought 28 years ago that branded beef would be mainstream?” he

asked. “Natural may not be a big market right now, but what will it be in 20 years? It represents a real opportunity for some cattlemen.”

The group fielded producer questions that ranged from the incentives available for natural production to current labeling requirements.

The speakers made their comments Feb. 1 during the Issues Forums sponsored by Pfizer Animal Health during the 2007 Cattle Industry Annual Convention and NCBA Trade Show. Each forum was repeated three times, allowing cattlemen to attend a session for three of the five topics presented. Audios and summaries of all five sessions will be available in the www.4cattlemen.com newsroom.

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