

“Crunchy” Beef Finishing and More Interactive Tools for the *Antis*

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Have you heard the new definition for the word “crunchy”? According to social media specialist, Seth Godin it means, “...a term to describe people who willingly alter their lifestyle to make less of an impact on the environment.” Personally, it will always mean the sound made when I walk across the snow covered ground when it’s about 10 degrees (like today outside my door). Of course, what it means to alter one’s lifestyle to make a positive impact is a bit more of a tricky question.

In fact, turning to the world of agriculture, it has always been thought that grass-fed beef steers rather than corn-fed steers are more environmentally friendly (sorry, *crunchier*). However, a recent study by J.L. Capper (Washington State University) and R.A. Cady (Elanco) paints a different picture.

“The Environmental Impact of Corn-Fed vs. Grass-Fed Beef Finishing Systems” was presented at the ASAS/ADSA 2010 Joint Annual Meeting in Denver, Colorado. The brief paper concludes that:

- “Reduced growth rate in grass-finishing systems increases finishing period length, resource use and methane emissions per kg beef
- Reduced slaughter weight and dressing % in grass-fed steers increases the number of animals required to produce a set amount of beef
- The perception of grass-fed beef as being more sustainable than corn-fed beef does not align with true sustainability when producing an equivalent amount of food from each system.”

This study (and others) should be taken very seriously in light of the continued demands on the world’s farmers. Bill Leshner, executive director of Global Harvest Initiative said, “We have 40 years in which to double agricultural output, but we have to do it in a sustainable fashion with the same amount of land, less water and reduced inputs.” We need to continue to look at the science of food production, not succumb to the emotional arguments. Here is a [link](#) to the recent article (and other research) by Dr. Capper.

The [Food and Water Watch](#) (FWW) has always been vocal about their concerns regarding the environment. Like most of us, they share a desire for a clean healthy environment – I suppose they might even describe themselves as *crunchy*. But they also have been vocal in their opposition to large livestock operations.

FWW recently released their latest version of the “Factory Farm Report Map.” This interactive map allows you to go to each state and look up the “density” of the livestock farming practices by each county and also which animals are being housed.

According to the FWW website, “It’s no accident that factory farms have spread across the country. Weak environmental rules and bad farm policy have allowed factory farms to take over livestock production.” FWW then provides a link with a pre-written letter **you** can send to the Environmental Protection Agency Administrator, Lisa Jackson, urging the Administrator to “...act swiftly to create a Clean Water Act permitting program” for large livestock.

I wonder if they would change their view of "Factory Farms" if they read Dr. Capper's report. It might be an interesting discussion over a pint of (organic) beer.

Finally, we continue to encourage agriculture to be proactive in complying with environmental regulations, including the recently amended Spill Prevention Control and Countermeasure (SPCC) Plans. We have an article that will be out very shortly in Hoard's Dairyman that will provide a quick overview of the **SPCC requirements**. If you need an SPCC plan, there may be no better time than during the winter months to develop your plan. If you have questions or need assistance, contact Christopher Paré (cpare@dragun.com) or Matthew Schroeder (mschroeder@dragun.com) at 248.932.0228.

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