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We've been preparing for this year's rounds of Ag Festivals. We bring in all of the students, usually 4<sup>th</sup> or 5<sup>th</sup> graders and teach them about Agriculture, water quality and many other topics. This is our chance to tell "our story" and not rely on some activist group to do it for us. I was just reading about Animal Welfare and Animal Rights. To some this terminology is interchangeable, but not really.

From Beef Daily, Amanda Radke writes:

"Ask consumers if they are for animal rights, many will likely say yes, without hesitation. Ask them if they think their dog should have the right to sue them, and maybe they'll hesitate. As ranchers, we should firmly own and dominate conversations about animal welfare; after all, we have a duty of care to our livestock that dates back for centuries. It's not only smart business sense to care for our animals, but it's the right thing to do, as well. However, I don't know too many ranchers who have determined the life of a steer is worth more than or equal to a person, and yet, that is what a segment of our population believes.

After all, dogs and cats don't cheat on their spouses, evade taxes, lie to their families or other such sins that we humans are capable of. Dogs and cats love unconditionally, and as a result, they quickly become true members of the family.

Meanwhile, that's an ugly truth, our consumers never have to hunt for their food. Most never have to wonder where their next meal comes from. They don't want to think about a steer or a hog dying in order for them to eat most would rather avoid as they walk up and down the bright and shiny grocery store aisles.

And so it's not that great of a leap to say a cow is equal to a dog is equal to a person. A dog is a beloved family member, so why shouldn't a cow be, as well? Surely, animal sanctuaries can handle them, and feedlots and ranches don't need to exist, right?

While many consumers wouldn't necessarily make that giant leap, the sad reality is that sometimes they do. Because our society is so far removed from the necessary circle of life, it may be our role as ranchers to remind them of the sometimes harsh truth of where their food comes from.

Without a doubt, we have a fantastic story to tell — one with an emphasis on fantastic animal husbandry, environmental stewardship and producing a nutritious product to feed the world. However, this story also comes with a less than pretty side. Animals get sick. Natural disasters strike. Market swings cause financial stress on producers. And ultimately, whether our consumer wants to face it or not, we slaughter animals for meat and by-products. It's reality. It isn't always perfect, but it's something we as ranchers understand and respect because we live it day in and day out."

Hopefully, we can get our story out to these future consumers, the 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> graders of our district!