

# Driving Retail Beef in 2007

The beef checkoff program plans to build upon successful initiatives to increase beef share and sales in this coming year. *By Bryan Salvage*

All in all, 2006 was "a very good year for the beef industry," says Randy Irion, director of retail marketing for the National Cattlemen's Beef Association (NCBA), which contracts to manage retail programs for the beef checkoff. Demand for beef remains strong. Beef dollar sales and pound sales, \$15.2 billion and 4.3 billion pounds, respectively, went up 1.6 percent for dollar sales and 2.6 percent for pound sales, based on *FreshLook* data for the 52-week period ending October 29, 2006—and this was despite increased supplies of other proteins.

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## Retailers Give Their Thoughts

In 2006, the beef checkoff funded the Retail Industry Thought Leader Survey, a follow-up to a survey conducted in 2003. "[In 2006] we talked with leading retailers, as well as a couple of packers and processors, to learn what they thought the issues facing their industry were—and what they were looking for from our beef checkoff program to assist them with growing beef demand in their retail operations," Irion says.

NCBA learned that labor and training are two major areas of interest for retailers, and they discovered that cross-promotions offer the beef industry great potential and opportunities for future growth. Customer education is also a high priority.

"Consumers are really constrained by the amount of time they have to prepare beef and their limited cooking knowledge," Irion says. "There is a need for more information at the meat case to help consumers prepare the kind of meals they desire to serve their families."

The beef industry's Easy Fresh Cooking label program is helping to build demand and sales. In 2005, the beef checkoff teamed up with the National Pork Board and Yerecic Label to create the Easy Fresh Cooking program, an evolution of the original Beef Made Easy label program. The labels include a photo and recipe in addition to cooking directions. The Easy Fresh Cooking program provides retailers with on-pack labels and other POP (point-

of-purchase) materials for the entire meat case.

"We have seen an increase in the pick-up of retail operations using the Easy Fresh Cooking label today," Irion says. "At any one point in time, there are about 17,000 supermarkets using either a form of the original Beef Made Easy label program or the newer Easy Fresh Cooking label program."

## Summer Grilling Heats Up Again

The beef checkoff's 2006 Summer Grilling campaign was a success. "We were very pleased with the results of our 2006 Summer Grilling campaign," Irion says. "FreshLook Marketing data show that during the 18-week Summer Grilling program, beef grilling cuts accounted for 67 percent of beef dollar sales. Beef's share, 56 percent of total meat dollar sales, increased by 0.75 percent – versus the 2005 program. Beef's share of pounds was at 44 percent of total pound sales – an increase of one percent from 2005 totals."

What's more, 45 percent of all "A" advertising features ("A" ads are the most dominant ads on a newspaper ad page) during the summer of 2006 were for beef, according to Promodata, the tracking service used by the beef checkoff to measure retail feature activity. Branded programs played a major role in increased "A" ad activity.

"New partners will participate in the 2007 Summer Grilling program to extend the impact of the beef checkoff," Irion says. The Wisconsin Milk Marketing Board is one new partner, promoting Wisconsin Cheese. "We have a cheeseburger promotion planned for Father's Day," Irion explains.

