

Difference MAKER



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hat fostered Dale Woerner's zeal for a career in meat science? He pinpoints the answer this way: "In my 33 years of life, by far the most impactful thing was my involvement in 4-H and FFA at a young age and my continuing involvement with judging teams at the college level."

Recognizing that support today in many states for 4-H, FFA and collegiate judging programs has faltered, Woerner describes himself as "lucky" to have had those experiences that were "wholeheartedly supported" by his parents, his 4-H county agent and what he calls a legendary ag teacher, who also taught his dad and uncles.

Additionally, Woerner credits his mom for fostering his involvement in the 4-H foods and nutrition project area – which was not common for boys to participate in. But Woerner enjoyed learning how to cook and developed a passion for entering the main dish category with a beef or pork recipe each year.

Once he arrived at Texas Tech and combined his 4-H and FFA upbringing with collegiate meat judging, Woerner quickly became a stand-out in the industry. Today, as a meat scientist on the faculty at Colorado State University, he is striving to pass his passion on to the next generation.

He says, "My number one priority in teaching students is to generate or rejuvenate an interest in production agriculture and make beef production fun." Woerner ranks teaching – be it a group of 4-H and FFA kids, college students or producers – among the most enjoyable parts of his job.

In addition to teaching meat science courses, he advises graduate students, mentors the CSU Meat Judging Team – which he coached to a national championship title while earning his Ph.D. – and keeps his connection with 4-H and FFA by chairing their state meats contests. Woerner also chairs the National 4-H Judging Advisory Committee which hosts an annual contest at the CSU facility in conjunction with the National Western Stock Show each January.

Preparing students with technical information so they can work effectively in their chosen field is important to Woerner. He notes that the need for the next generation to understand science along with production, supply, efficiency, and safety is paramount.

An added challenge Woerner has noticed is that more

and more students with ag backgrounds are going into other professions, and there are particularly fewer male students studying agriculture.

"We need to address getting young adults to come and stay in the industry," says Woerner. Reflecting on the strong influence 4-H and FFA had in his own life, Woerner suggests, "It is time to reinvest in 4-H and FFA at the county level. That's the foundation and often the starting point for bringing students into agricultural careers."

Research Role

Woerner is also working to make a positive difference in the beef industry via the research projects he is involved with. Research comprises 70% of his CSU faculty appointment.

His projects have encompassed beef, veal, (and lamb) nutrient profiling, understanding beef flavor, beef tenderness surveillance, cookery methods and meat palatability, and understanding carcass composition and yield.

He has had an integral role with the Nutrient Database Improvement (NDI) project in conjunction with Texas A&M, Texas Tech and USDA. The effort updated the standard reference of nutrients for individual beef cuts. Woerner explains the 2012 USDA mandate for nutrient labeling on meat products made it important for the beef industry to have current nutrient profile information.

The updated research identified that today's beef is leaner – a positive for the industry. Woerner says, "We hope this has a major impact on beef consumption going forward and helping people choose beef as a center of the plate item."

Looking ahead at challenges facing the beef industry, Woerner underscores that supply is the issue. He adds, "Rebuilding beef supply doesn't happen quickly, and in turn, limited supply drives beef prices higher which creates another challenge for consumers."

Going forward he says, "We need to be conscious that as more beef continues to gain value and grow in global markets, we need to address the challenge to maintain domestic beef demand."

He adds, "Flavor, tenderness and nutrition are the things we need to focus on to maintain domestic beef demand. People will pay for beef if it delivers those three things."

Dale Woerner

- 33-Years-Old
- Assistant Professor, Colorado State University Center for Meat Safety and Quality
- Bachelor's and Master's degrees in Animal Science at Texas Tech University, Ph.D. in Meat Science from CSU, 2009
- Resides in Greeley, Colo.

BACKGROUND: Woerner grew up in Fredericksburg, Texas; as a youngster was involved in beef, lamb, and poultry projects in 4-H and then FFA, which inspired him to pursue a degree in Animal Science. Collegiate meats judging at Texas Tech fueled his passion in meat science.

FAMILY: Wife Wendy, who also has a Master's in Meat Science from Texas Tech, works as a financial manager for Producers Feedlot and Cervi Cattle Co. in Greeley. Son Drake, 2-1/2.

WORDS TO LIVE BY: Respect yourself and others in all that you do.

HOBBIES: Barbecuing and entertaining friends, following college football

BUCKET LIST ITEM: Dale and Wendy have considered entering competitive barbecue contests someday.

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