



COLLABORATION PLATFORM ON AGRICULTURE

USDA-DG AGRI Virtual Event on Sustainability Efforts in the US and EU Cattle and Beef Supply Chains

On May 16th, 2023, USDA and DG AGRI officials and representatives of beef producers in the EU and the US met. The goal was to share information, exchange ideas and discuss sustainability efforts in the US and EU cattle and beef supply chains.

EU beef producer representatives, COPA-COGECA explained that there is not yet a suitable methodology to capture a complex issue as sustainability. The main difficulty is to capture the notion in a simple message or label that is meaningful to the consumer. The definition should be based on sufficiently flexible and articulated requirements to capture efforts from diverse beef production systems e.g. extensive or intensive.

EU beef processors, represented by UECBV presented the function and goals of the organisation. They described their various initiatives to make beef production in the EU more sustainable. All along the chain from farmers, slaughterhouses, traders to the retailer, efforts and contributions are made to improve sustainability such as by making maximum use of the animal product.

US beef producers, represented by the NCBA presented a video illustrating the US model of beef production. The sector has caused no deforestation and is based on mostly family-owned holdings (92%). Some 90% of cattle feed is composed of material inedible to humans and, the industry contributes to the circular economy by making effective use of human food by-products. The example given was the production of french fries and the consumption by cattle of potato trimmings that would otherwise pollute the environment. Around 85% of cattle producers in the US have joined a beef quality assurance program. All production chains ranging from cow/calf operations which are grass-fed to final fattening feedlots are improving the animals' diets. The aim of the US beef industry is to become climate neutral by 2040. NCBA stressed the need to inform consumers of these developments.

A representative of DG AGRI animal products market unit presented EU policy objectives and a series of research activities intended to make the livestock sector more sustainable in the EU. Research which was mentioned as a strategic element both by COPA-COGECA and UECVB.

USDA presented its main initiatives in promoting sustainability via new research funds and bottom up promoted innovation.

Constructive discussions too place with a clear focus on sustainability issues. The interplay between regulation and a market-based approach may differ across the Atlantic. However, there is an emerging feeling that beef producers have a real interest to cooperate to improve sustainability and to share evidence to better support their claims for beef production being a genuinely sustainable industry. Research initiatives will have a key role.

