

Evidence doesn't support red meat, cancer link

MeatPoultry.com, January 29, 2010

by Bryan Salvage

SAN ANTONIO -- As a continuation of beef checkoff efforts to examine the totality of the evidence on the subject of red meat and cancer, the "Red Meat and Processed Meat Consumption and Cancer: A Technical Summary of the Epidemiologic Evidence" was released to members of the Human Nutrition Research Committee during the Cattle Industry's Annual Convention this week in San Antonio.

Cancer is the second-leading cause of death (after heart disease) in the U.S.; about one in every three Americans will be diagnosed with some type of cancer during their lifetime. While the specific cause(s) of most cancer is still unknown, researchers believe it stems from genetic, lifestyle, infectious and environmental factors, and usually develops over several years or even decades.

Author and leading epidemiologist Dr. Dominik Alexander, PhD, MSPH, said this reality adds to the difficulty in identifying the underlying factors involved in carcinogenesis. Even with these challenges, Dr. Alexander goes on to say, "...no mechanism for red meat has been established as being responsible for increasing the risk of cancer in human studies and ...the totality of available scientific evidence is not supportive of an independent association between red meat and processed meat and cancer."

The fundamental basis of the science of epidemiology (the study of the occurrence of disease in human populations) and its applicability in critically evaluating the associations between red and processed meat and cancer across the published literature is reviewed in this technical summary. Its assessment includes a comprehensive evaluation of hundreds of epidemiologic studies across all types of cancer.

"This will serve as a comprehensive resource on the epidemiologic associations of red meat and processed meat and cancer for industry stake holders, nutrition scientists, educators and communicators," said Shalene McNeill, PhD, RD, executive director of nutrition research with the National Cattlemen's Beef Association (N.C.B.A.), a beef checkoff contractor. "It concludes the available epidemiologic evidence is not supportive of a causal relationship between red meat and any of the cancers evaluated."

As the first large-scale review of this topic, the beef and pork checkoffs joined forces to fund the development of this study. The piece was prepared by Health Sciences Practice, Exponent Inc., under the direction of principal investigator Dominik Alexander, PhD, MSPH.

[Click here to read an overview.](#)

The Technical Summary will be available for purchase in February at a cost of \$30.00 through the N.C.B.A. Customer Service department. For purchasing information, call (303) 368-3138.