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2. Participation and Leadership in Beef Industry Organizations
3. Research Paper
4. Agricultural organizations have served the industry for nearly 150 years, but there are greater demands on these grassroots organizations and the volunteer leaders that serve them. This research utilized sixteen interviews with cattle producers across the country to conduct an analysis of participation and leadership in beef industry organizations.
5. Crystal Mathews was raised as one of five children on a family farm in Southwest Missouri. She graduated from the University of Missouri in 2005 with a B.S. in Agricultural Education. While at Mizzou, she completed her student-teaching experience at an inner-city Chicago high school, spent five months working for the USDA Livestock and Seed Program in Washington, D.C, and spent a year traveling the country as the National Beef Ambassador. After completing her M.S. in Agricultural Economics at Texas A&M University in 2007, Crystal began her doctoral program at the University of Florida, where she is currently studying agricultural leadership and serving as a graduate teaching and research assistant. She has presented youth leadership workshops across the country and continues to facilitate leadership conferences for the National FFA Organization.

Dr. Hannah Carter grew up surrounded by the potato fields of Aroostook County, Maine. She graduated 1995 with a B.S. degree in Environmental Science from the University of Maine at Presque Isle. Upon graduation, she began her career with the University of Maine Cooperative Extension (UMCE) working within Maine's potato industry. In 1999, she graduated with her M.S. in agricultural education and communication from the University of Florida and in 2004 she earned her Ph.D. from UF in agricultural leadership. She currently is

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6. If accepted, please print in conference proceedings.
7. Please consider for a poster presentation if not accepted.
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9. No

## Introduction

Agricultural organizations have been an active part of American agriculture since 1867 (National Grange History, 2002). Throughout the years, names change, mergers and splits occur, the issues evolve, but one thing has remained constant: agricultural organizations are working to sustain America's oldest livelihood, heritage, and a way of life that continues for millions of farmers and ranchers today (American Farm Bureau Federation, 2007). These organizations were formed and continue to be funded by and for agriculturalists and their specific interests (Association History, 2008).

From product promotion to legislative lobbying, and from producer education to consumer communication, the activities of agricultural organizations are directed by members beginning at the grassroots level and carried out by staff and volunteers at local, state, and national levels (Association History, 2008). The volunteer leadership that producer members provide plays a vital role in supporting and sustaining the mission and goals for these organizations.

These volunteer leaders of agricultural organizations take on many roles, including elected officers, committee and board chairpersons and members, event planners, and fundraising organizers. Some roles are assigned leaders with a title and designated length of service, while others are emergent leaders who take the responsibility without a title or official office (Northouse, 2007). One might consider both the president of the organization and the member who spearheads membership recruitment efforts to be leaders, but leadership is expressed and identified differently in each situation.

The beef industry comprises one piece of the vast American agricultural industry, but the economic, environmental, and political impacts of this industry segment are far-reaching. The U.S. beef industry is comprised of more than one million farms, ranches, and businesses from all 50 states (National Cattlemen's Beef Association [NCBA], 2007). On January 1, 2009, there were an estimated 94.5 million head of cattle and 800,000 ranchers and cattlemen in the United States (Cattle Fax, 2009). U.S. cash receipts from cattle and calves totaled \$49.6 billion in 2005 (NCBA, 2007). Beef is an important component in diets of Americans, as nearly nine out of ten U.S. households will eat beef at home in the next two weeks (NCBA, 2006).

The U.S. beef industry is not only vast; it is also very efficient. The United States has less than 10 percent of the world's cattle inventory, but produces approximately 25 percent of the world's beef supply (NCBA, 2006). With the amount of beef produced within the United States, export markets play a vital role in the movement and consumption of U.S. beef and the profits returned to producers and processors.

In order to stay in business, one has to make a profit or avoid losing too much. This requires a knowledge and understanding of consumer needs and demands, and the ability to efficiently and effectively meet those needs and demands. This also requires cooperation or minimal interference from local, state and national governments (Catchings & Wingenbach, 2006).

With the volatility of the political arena, there is never a guarantee that the interests of America's beef producers will be protected or considered with each new piece of legislation or jurisdiction

from the courts. This has created the need for unity amongst beef producers through industry organizations. Such organizations have historically played an integral role in the ratification and implementation of farm legislation. They also serve as channels of communication between producers and policy makers (Catchings & Wingenbach, 2006). There is strength in numbers, and these organizations provide a synergistic voice and greater influence than any individual member on their own.

One organization within the beef industry that was created for this purpose is the National Cattlemen's Beef Association (NCBA). In 1898, a national cattle producers organization was formed to combat issues such as land rights, cattle rustling, and the packer monopoly (Association History, 2008). For more than 100 years, this organization has sought to bring cattle producers together to fight for rights and issues with a unified front. "Through three mergers, numerous organizational splits, economic busts, natural disasters, world wars, changing political views and evolving consumer wants, the National Cattlemen's Beef Association has persevered as the voice of the American beef industry" (Association History, 2008, p. 1).

Today, NCBA is a grassroots agricultural organization consisting of more than 25,000 members nationwide (Association History, 2008). Together with 64 state affiliates and breed and industry organization members, NCBA represents more than 230,000 cattle breeders, feeders, and producers. As a producer operated organization, members fulfill leadership roles at the county, state, and national levels, perhaps in conjunction with paid staff, to carry out the operations and goals of the organization.

It is crucial to the survival of NCBA and its subsidiary associations to have leaders that are competent and effective in fulfilling their service to the industry and association. These leadership roles carry with them a degree of credibility that must be protected. Leaders in the beef industry have a responsibility to have the knowledge and understanding necessary to communicate the reality of what is happening in the industry and global marketplace (Purcell, 2002).

Former NCBA President and cattle producer Mike John has said it is a struggle to recruit leaders to leave successful businesses for volunteer service (personal communication, April 29, 2008). Potential leaders have responsibilities and commitments to their agricultural operations and professions that make it a challenge for them to devote time and resources to serve in leadership roles. Some leadership roles, such as serving as a national officer in the NCBA, require spending approximately 300 days on the road in a given year (M. John, personal communication, April 29, 2008). Only in identifying the factors that influence the decisions that producers make to take on the responsibilities of leadership can we answer the question of how to recruit emerging leaders and address their concerns about leadership. Agricultural organizations such as NCBA have the potential to make a greater impact in serving the beef industry and beef producers by more effectively recruiting, training and retaining volunteer leadership.

The purpose of this research was to assess beef producers' perceptions of, interest in, and commitment to serving in leadership roles within the beef industry. The objectives of this research were to:

1. Identify the factors that influence producer members' decisions to participate and lead in beef industry organizations
2. Determine perceptions of cattlemen about volunteer leadership responsibilities and commitments

This study is significant because of its implications for agricultural organizations. Understanding participation in and perceptions of leadership in volunteer organizations is important because it can be used to enhance participation and leadership in voluntary groups (Chinman & Wandersman, 1999).

With an aging generation of agriculturalists in this country, organizations will have to find a way to attract new members and leaders from an upcoming younger generation (Allen & Harris, 2005). This research could initiate or provide direction for programs and training to prepare more producers for leadership roles in the future.

Carter and Rudd (2005) analyzed participation and leadership of active members within Florida Farm Bureau. Other researchers have conducted analyses and evaluations of other agricultural organizations and their members. With this study being focused on a beef industry organization, it will be of interest to compare the findings with similar research that has previously been done in other agricultural organizations.

Agricultural organizations, particularly those in the beef industry, can utilize this research to better understand producer members' concerns, apprehensions, and conflicts with volunteering for leadership roles. With this knowledge, organizations can improve their leadership recruitment and retention efforts presently, and then more effectively address these issues with potential leaders in the future.

Agricultural organizations were formed out of a necessity to promote and protect America's oldest industry and the livelihood of millions of Americans through a unified voice. The lifeblood of agricultural organizations is the members who participate. The pinnacle of that participation is the time and resources that are dedicated to serving the organization. In order for beef industry organizations to continue to protect their producers, members must be willing to serve the organization through leadership. By understanding why members' choose to participate in organizational leadership roles, and how they determine where to allocate their time, current beef industry leaders and employees can work to recruit and retain members to lead this industry into the next century.

### **Literature Review**

Chinman and Wandersman (1999) conducted an extensive literature review of the costs and benefits associated with participation in voluntary organizations. They found that costs and benefits can be measured, they are related to participation, and they can be managed by voluntary organization leaders. In 2001, Catano, Pond and Kelloway explored leadership and organizational commitment in volunteer organizations. Volunteer leaders were found to be more psychologically involved and committed to their organization and rated higher in transformational leadership when compared to members of a trade union.

Social exchange theory has been used to determine patterns of volunteer participation in natural resource and environmental organizations (Passewitz, 1991). Passewitz developed three models based on incentives of volunteerism to predict four patterns of volunteer participant behavior. This model is based on social exchange theory's emphasis on rewards, costs, and reciprocation. The models define three reasons why people become involved in volunteer activities within an organization: (1) their values match those of the volunteer organization; (2) people volunteer based on their self-interest, ranging from a desire for recognition to gaining job related experience; (3) and people volunteer based on their social relationship network, including family, friends, and professional relationships. Each of these models is used to predict four patterns of volunteer participation which include: (a) levels of involvement, from little activity to holding positions of leadership; (b) amount of time contributed per month; (c) percent of volunteer activities participated in; (d) and consistency of participation over time. Results showed the most important value based benefit as doing something useful, the dominant self-interest based benefit was a sense of achievement, and the highest rated networking benefit was meeting new people. Only two costs of volunteering were rated as important, the self-interest based costs of lack of free time and night meetings.

Carter and Rudd (2005) explained individual motivations, attitudes towards volunteering, and opinions of serving on county Farm Bureau boards by determining the reasons why local Farm Bureau members choose to participate or not participate in leadership roles in local county farm bureau boards. The five variables of volunteering evaluative factor, volunteering activity factor, number of farm bureau events attended, membership in youth development organizations, and participation in leadership development program explained 36% of the variance in serving on county boards. The most significant variable with the largest explanatory power was the volunteering evaluative factor. Close to half of respondents had belonged to 4-H or FFA. How individuals evaluate volunteering was the strongest determinant of serving on county boards. Farm Bureau should appeal to individuals on a personal level, highlighting the value to their lives, personal achievement, and use of skills and talents that accompanies serving on county boards.

Participation and volunteer leadership in organizations requires motivated individuals who are willing to make a commitment. Barbuto, Trout and Brown (2004) used the Motivation Sources Inventory (MSI) to measure five sources of motivation among rural farm workers. The prevailing source of motivation for the rural farm workers was self-concept internal motivation. This implies that agricultural workers are internally self-directed and their behavior is based off their beliefs of what is required to be their ideal self. They are naturally motivated to live up to a standard set by themselves, and need more than fun, money, public recognition/reputation, or a purpose/worthy cause to motivate them. Kalkowski and Fritz (2004) examined the history of perceived gender differences related to motivation in organizational settings, the implications this has for women in leadership, and what role women and their motivation will play if the industry continues to head to a more participative type of leadership.

Recognition can be key to maintaining volunteer motivation. In 2003, Fritz, Karmazin, Barbuto and Burrow compared rural and urban 4-H volunteers in motivation, recognition, and program quality perceptions. Both urban and rural volunteers were predominately motivated by

affiliation needs, followed by achievement and power needs. Organizations are constantly try to expand their volunteer pool by competing for volunteers' time, and developing and implementing strategies to retain, recognize, and develop volunteers. Penrod (1991) developed the LOOP model for developing volunteer leadership, which includes Locating, Orienting, Operating and Perpetuating. The LOOP model is designed to increase project effectiveness and efficiency while helping volunteers stayed motivated and focused. Every organization competes for volunteers' time with every other activity to which volunteers could alternatively devote that time. Time-use studies research the duration and frequency of human activities. Research has shown that humans spend as much as three to four hours per day multi-tasking (Stinson, 1999).

Most cattle producers are self-employed entrepreneurs, and organizations must keep this in mind as they recruit, train and retain volunteer leaders. Reimers-Hild, et al. (2005) suggest that entrepreneurs and those who are successful at distance learning may share similar characteristics because they seek out opportunities and maximize their resources. Entrepreneurial personality is measured by the combined score of locus of control, need for achievement, and risk taking propensity. This paper suggests that a relationship exists between entrepreneurial personality and success and persistence in academic environments.

Research suggests a need for more effective beef industry leadership. Purcell (2002) addressed problems within the beef industry that must be addressed to keep the industry healthy, meaning profitable, sustainable, and resources are protected. Inadequate beef industry leadership was one issue addressed. Prescriptions for a healthy industry include continued support for the Beef Check Off program and elected leadership of beef industry organizations hiring competent, professional staff and listening to them in order to address the media and general public with more knowledge and understanding of pending industry issues.

### **Methodology**

Qualitative inquiry was deemed to be the best fit for this research. People are complex and difficult to study, especially when attempting to assess perceptions and factors that influence behavior. Observation and replication can be challenging, particularly for quantitative researchers who may not recognize the bias of their own values and attitudes and may have problems with the interactions between subjects and observers (Ary, Jacobs, & Razavieh, 2002). Unlike qualitative researchers, they tend to collect observations from a distance and try not to interact with subjects (participants) or the environment.

This qualitative research is done as a basic descriptive study utilizing basic interpretive methods. The data is collected through interviews and observations with cattle producers to identify themes and patterns of participation and leadership in beef industry organizations. This type of research design allows for an in-depth analysis of the participation and leadership patterns of cattle producers. However, only a limited number of producers can be interviewed, so the purposive sample must be diverse and include producers from a variety of perspectives and backgrounds.

Interviews were scheduled with the cattle producers chosen for the purposive sample. Sixteen interviews were conducted face-to-face, with cattlemen and cattlemen identified from each of

the following groups: past beef industry leaders, current industry leaders, emerging industry leaders, members that participate but are not in leadership roles, members that pay dues but do not actively participate, and cattlemen that are not dues paying members of any beef industry organizations. All dues-paying cattle producers were NCBA members. Additionally some were local and state cattlemen's affiliate members and breed association members. Participants interviewed for this research represented several different regions of the country and were involved in various segments of the cattle industry, including seedstock, cow/calf, backgrounding, feedlots, livestock auctions, and allied industry.

Data collection for this research occurred during the spring of 2009 with interviews conducted at each participant's home or ranch. A list of nineteen interview questions was generated and piloted with an expert panel. These questions served as the foundation for the semi-structured interviews and further probing questions were asked when needed for clarification or additional explanation. The interviews were audio taped and transcribed into written documents. Field notes were taken during the interview and ranch visit and transcribed as well. The process of transcription serves as a measure of validity and a method of analysis. These documents were organized and formatted in preparation for coding and data analysis.

The qualitative research conducted through the interviews was organized into a logical format for analysis and interpretation. Weft QDA software was used for coding and categorizing themes. The data was coded and re-coded using constant comparative analysis to look for patterns that emerged and indicate variables that may influence volunteer leadership. Categories were re-combined into themes using constant-comparative and discrepant analysis. Variables discovered through this procedure were summarized and interpreted.

While limited research has been conducted to study volunteer leadership in grassroots agricultural organizations, the literature reveals some studies that contribute to the knowledge base and methodology for conducting such research. The methodology of this research is designed to achieve the objectives of this study by obtaining answers and results that are valid and reliable.

## **Results**

Each the sixteen cattle producers interviewed in this study had been involved in the cattle industry at least since they finished their last year of formal education. "I've been involved my entire life," or "just about forever" were common statements. Of the participants that were dues-paying members of beef industry organizations, all happened to be members of NCBA in addition to other cattle organizations and several were Farm Bureau members as well. Those who were members ranged from 4 to 45 years of membership, while the average length of membership was just more than 20 years.

Themes emerged in six categories relating to participation and leadership in beef industry organizations: organizational involvement; membership and leadership recruitment; costs and benefits of leadership; leadership development; volunteerism and humility. Several themes came out of each these categories.

*Organizational Involvement* – Every participant interviewed in this research discussed organizational involvement, with nearly 50 comments related to why they did or did not get involved. More than half of the participants talked about the importance and challenges of getting more young people involved. Those producers who had been involved in the past indicated they were highly likely to stay involved in the future.

For those that did get involved, many did so because they found common ground with the people, philosophy and culture associated with the organization. People want to spend their time involved in something they perceive to be worthwhile, where they feel they are making a difference. “If you can’t make a difference, you won’t do it.” Many participants enjoy their involvement and several stated it was “just the right thing to do.” A strong passion for and real commitment to the industry was discussed many times as reasons to be involved. One producer summarized involvement: “Come, get educated, get informed, and then use that in their organization back home or in their community, in their area, in their state, around the world.”

Data revealed that just because people did not like an organization did not mean that they would not join, but they were much less likely to become involved. Some chose not to be involved because they did not see the value in it. One young producer said, “If I don’t know the benefit of it, I ain’t going to do it.” Another producer referred to an organization’s annual meetings as “a big social, drinks and hors d’oeuvres deal...tea parties never have turned me on. I want to go get something done.”

Several producers said they did not know or understand what the organization did until they became involved, while several did not become involved because they did not know what the organization did or where dues money spent. This can be a vicious cycle and difficult for organizations to break. Some were unsure of how to get involved, one stating that he “found it very hard to figure out where I was supposed to be [within the organization].”

*Membership and Leadership Recruitment* – Every participant except one mentioned they or others became members of beef industry organizations or involved in volunteer leadership roles because they were asked. The idea of asking people to join or participate came up 25 times throughout all the interviews. One producer spoke of the number of people he had recruited to join organizations saying, “You just have to keep asking. I have a passion for it and some of mine will rub off on them and I will get them for \$100.” Another cattle producer talked about the lack of people asking fellow producers to join because of the culture of the cattle industry. “We don’t go around trying to sell people stuff. And that’s a tradition that just kills us in membership.”

When it comes to leadership involvement, the majority of the participants became involved because someone asked them to. Most saw this as an advantage to getting the right people. One commented that the “best leaders I’ve seen are the ones that do it because someone talks them into it, rather than deciding up front they want to do it...because it’s a service mindset.” Several were not involved in certain industry organizations because they had been selected instead of asked to serve, and because they felt they had not been for anything of substance.

*Costs and Benefits of Leadership* – The costs and benefits of serving in volunteer leadership roles was frequently a theme of conversation among participants. The rewards of leadership that emerged include education and knowledge gained, both from formal seminars and cattlemen’s colleges and through conversations with other producers. “The thing about the cattle business is people don’t mind sharing, particularly something that’s worked well for them.” Other rewards include time spent with like-minded people, building relationships with long-term friends and business partners, and making the “beef business better” which in turn improves their livelihoods.

The biggest cost of leadership, which emerged from nearly 30 comments, is the time it requires. Personal time, family time, travel time and ranch time were each discussed in regards to the time commitment of serving as a volunteer leader. Many producers said they would be more involved if they felt they had the time, while one young producer talked about “activity overload.” Other costs include monetary costs of taking off work and paying to go to meetings and conventions, and giving up personal opinions to represent the voice of the organization. Some producers felt these costs were not a great sacrifice, one producer noting that “this industry has given me quite a bit...I damned sure ought to be able to give something back.” While others felt the costs were too great, especially for the family. “We’re not willing to sacrifice the family to work for the betterment of the industry.”

*Leadership Development* – As participants discussed their experiences and perceptions in regards to leadership roles and development, many of them began asking themselves questions. “How do I keep the leadership of agriculture in the hands of people that know it, love it, live it?” “How do we keep people from leading in an uninformed manner?” “How do we keep the leadership in people that want and understand a long-term and sustainable business?” Many discussed the implications of leadership development, and how the trade associations can be more competitive with a progression of strong, well-trained leaders.

Several acknowledged that the need for leadership development was stronger today than it ever has been before. Regarding priorities, one participant said, “Our organization has continued to have leadership and leadership development as important but not as critical.” Some noted the problem is that leadership development isn’t an issue staring you in the face waiting for a response; it doesn’t demand legislative action or a media response right now. “Leadership development...it’s just, it’s really not real sexy.”

Half of the participants discussed a need for leadership training. “If we’re going to have people that can run these organizations, they kind of need to be trained how to do it...they’re cattlemen. Which is not a negative, but this a very different role, in understanding group dynamics and decision making processes and persuasive speaking.” A couple noted that the leadership of an organization is not a coincidence; it must be cultivated.

More than half of the participants had been chosen by their state to attend the Young Cattlemen’s Conference (YCC) with NCBA. All but one of the cattle producers that had been involved at the national level were YCC alumni. Everyone that had been on YCC commented on the impact of the program in regards to their industry organizational participation and leadership. Three

cattlemen said it was one of the best things they had ever done in their life, while only said, “I got more out of that trip than I did out of the 4 years of college education.”

Three comments were made in regards to the producers’ decisions not to be involved in leadership because it was hereditary, not merit-based. They perceived leadership roles to be passed down through certain families in particular beef industry organizations. One producer expressed frustration with leadership because the “decisions that were being made, they weren’t speaking my language. It was politically based and not based on sound science and what’s best for livestock production and for the environment.”

*Volunteerism* – More than half of those interviewed talked about the importance of volunteerism, that it does make a difference and help guide the organization. “I particularly think that clubs and organizations fulfill a great, great service in this country...most countries around the globe do not have the service organizations that we have in this country. Or the volunteerism within us that we have in America.” Several people discussed the need for volunteers with pure motives. While some “want to be on there to do the greater good, you get some that are just totally self-serving.” When folks volunteer their time, they have to buy into the organization and know that what they are doing makes a difference.

There was a need expressed for organizational members to be forgiving of volunteers who aren’t perfect people. One beef producer discussed the concerns of volunteer leaders who struggle with knowing what to say and how to say it when they represent the organization. “You’re talking about people that aren’t paid, these are volunteer leaders and I think people gotta realize that you get a pass on some of that because it isn’t your profession. It’s your passion but it’s not your profession.”

*Humility* – A majority of the participants discussed humility, both in terms of leadership and membership. One past organizational leader said, “it will humble you to know the quality of people that you’re working for, and the impact we can have on the young people that have a burning desire to try to get into livestock and this business.” Several discussed how serving in leadership roles had been a humbling experience, even if ego played a role in their decision to lead. Others discussed the humble nature of most cattle producers. “It’s not considered a positive trait in a producer that you’re arrogant, and brag and talk about how many cows you have and what you do.” The implications related to this humility of producers include a lack of recruitment because many producers won’t ask their neighbors for something (membership), and a lack of leadership because people don’t pursue leadership roles unless they are asked.

## **Conclusions**

Organizations that are looking to recruit members and leaders need to place more emphasis on purposefully identifying those potential members and/or leaders and asking them to join, be involved or serve the organization in specific capacities. In doing so, the value of such participation must be very clear for people to be willing to give up the time that they could devote to other things. Asking clearly emerged as the dominant way this industry recruits and engages people.

There is a need for leadership training and development programs to continue and expand in order to meet the need for organizational leadership within the agricultural industry. We can learn from the effective programs that are already in place, in addition to listening to the leadership education needs that producer members identify in the skills and knowledge they feel are necessary to fulfill their leadership commitments and responsibilities. If a grassroots organization is to truly make leadership development a critical priority, leadership training must be delivered all the way down to the grassroots level of the organization.

The Young Cattlemen's Conference, conducted by NCBA, has been very effective in identifying and developing industry leaders. Many questions could be explored related to YCC. Should it remain a small, elite event or be expanded to include more people and develop more leaders? YCC is for cattle producers age 25 to 50, but the average age is 35 to 40. Could the industry develop a similar or alternative program that is just as effective but reaching an even younger audience? Does YCC need to include more leadership development instead of focusing only on industry awareness and expansion of understanding?

Successful organizations must sustain themselves by addressing the costs associated with serving in volunteer roles within organizations, particularly the issue of the time commitment. Two participants suggested developing more leaders to share and spread the responsibilities of leadership, so that industry leadership does not remain such a large burden on a few people. This requires organizations to break traditions and habits and get away from the way things have always been, and this type of change does not come easily in a longstanding organization.

Arrogance is a turn-off in this industry, and should be considered when selecting leaders and hiring staff for beef industry organizations. Keeping in mind that there are differences between confidence, pride and arrogance, humble people typically do not respond well to others with inflated egos.

Further research should be conducted to further explore and understand patterns of participation and leadership in agricultural organizations, especially the perceptions and motivations of volunteers. Quantitative data could be gathered through survey research to further analyze producers' perceptions of and commitment to serving in industry organizations. These questions of participation and leadership in agricultural organizations should be asked to producer members in other fields and compared to these cattle producers to see where issues, challenges and needs align, and to determine how the agricultural industry can take a holistic, unified approach to leadership development.

Beef industry organizations, like nearly all agricultural organizations, are comprised of and led by agriculturalists who give up their time and resources to better their industry through involvement in these organizations. They are unique in that the organization serves the interests of those producer members who serve the organization by paying dues, participating, volunteering and leading. This research provides more insight into the people surrounding agricultural organizations, both inside and outside, and their voices, opinions and perceptions can be used to strengthen the organization by better recruiting and retaining members and volunteer leaders, which in turn strengthens the agricultural industry through producer unity and effective legislative and issues management work.

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