

EVERY BITE COUNTS: Checkoff Funds Support Campaign to Promote Beef Consumption in the Early Years



By Elizabeth Schiedermayer for the North Dakota Beef Commission

The mission of the North Dakota Beef Commission (NDBC) is to enhance consumer demand for beef, increase consumer awareness of beef and strengthen consumer trust in the beef industry. An important component of succeeding at this mission is promoting the nutritional value of beef and educating nutrition influencers, consumers and producers about beef's role in a healthy diet and lifestyle.

Setting the Stage for Health

Recently, the NDBC joined in on the launch of the national *"Early Years: Every Bite Counts"* campaign to educate parents on how building a healthy foundation for a child's diet in the early years can positively shape their diet later on in life. This program is managed by the National Cattlemen's Beef Association (NCBA), a contractor to the beef checkoff.

"Beef is a foundational food that nourishes and optimizes Americans' health at every life stage," says Caitlin Mondelli, registered dietitian and director of Food and Health Communication at NCBA. "The American Academy of Pediatrics advises that meat, including beef, be introduced as an early solid food in an infant's diet, since proper nutrition during this critical time sets the stage for continued development and lifelong health."



Sharon Kickertz-Gerbig, NDBC Commissioner

Sharon Kickertz-Gerbig, NDBC commissioner, says establishing good, nutritious and healthy eating habits in infants is the cornerstone to building healthy adults. "We know the impact a small amount of beef, rich in nutrients like iron, zinc, B vitamins and more, can have in a growing child's diet. I am excited there are now guidelines that health professionals are sharing with parents," she notes.

Dietary Guidelines

These new Dietary Guidelines for Americans (DGAs) include introducing complementary foods to infants at around six months in order to provide proper nourishment. The *"Early Years: Every Bite Counts"* campaign educates consumers on the benefits of beef as a first food choice because of its high bioavailability of nutrients such as iron, protein, zinc, B vitamins, choline, and fat. Research shows all nutrients are key to the health and development of an infant, but nutrients found in beef are particularly important.

For infants and young children, nutrients such as iron and zinc have been identified as critically important in supporting proper growth and development. The American



Academy of Pediatrics and World Health Organization recommend infants receive two servings, or four tablespoons, per day of iron-rich complementary foods, such as beef. Infants can start with thin, pureed foods at around six months and advance to complex textures, including chopped foods, finger foods and family food, by the end of the first year.

The *"Early Years: Every Bite Counts"* campaign helps parents to consciously choose what to offer children during the early years, helping to shape children's eating habits later in life. "When families choose beef as the primary protein for a baby or toddler, it also means beef is now a staple in the family's diet. This helps mold and form tastes and preferences that carry on when they are adults," says Kickertz-Gerbig. "Beef producers should be proud of the checkoff funded research that provided the science leading to new national DGAs including beef as a first food in the diets of children ages six months to 24 months."

