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Bug buffets are an anti-livestock smoke screen

By Dirck Steimel

Look out America: The bugs are back.

I'm not alerting you about a creepy summer thriller at the local theater or offering a mosquito forecast for the picnic season. No, this warning is about so-called "futurists" who are trying to convince consumers that, without a doubt, insects are the next big thing for protein in your diet.

The articles and television reports about munching on mealworms or chomping crickets are often meant to be funny. And they emphasize that consumers really just need to get over the "ick" factor of insect consumption.

But there's an underlying message in these reports that is very anti-livestock.

That message is usually being driven by radical animal rights activists trying to convince consumers, despite overwhelming evidence to the contrary, that production of beef, pork, chicken and other meats is environmentally unsustainable. The activists, such as the Humane Society of the United States and its allies, want the public to believe that if humans want to keep consuming animal protein, they're going to have to forgo delicious steaks, chops and burgers and instead tuck into the bug buffet.

OK, don't have a problem with people who want to eat insects or with farmers who raise them for food. Food choice is a wonderful thing, even choices that, let's say, turn the stomachs of most people.

But what really bugs me is the animal rights activist groups' subtle message that raising livestock is bad for the environment and is on its way to extinction. That's just not true.

Livestock farming gains

Raising livestock has always been sustainable and has fit well into a wide variety of environments around the globe. And it's even better today, thanks to hard work by today's livestock farmers.

For example, raising pork today uses nearly 80 percent less land and 41 percent less water and maintains a much lower carbon footprint than it did 50 years ago. Those environmental gains have been achieved while pig farmers are producing a lot more delicious and nutritious protein that is in demand all over the world. There are similar success stories in beef and other livestock species.

So the next time you hear some buzz about eating insects as the inevitable solution to fill future protein needs, just tell your friends and family to swat that notion away.