

Bluestem Breezes  
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## **Cattlemen Contribute to Create Better Communities**

As the entire month of May is dedicated to Beef Month, I hope you take a few extra minutes to consider thanking our local cattlemen for their contributions to our community. This week's column offers several interesting facts on the many faces dedicated to the beef industry.

A close colleague of mine wrote this column and I believe the information warrants sharing in another Flint Hills county. I updated the county name; all other information is credited to Anna Curry, Greenwood County Extension Agent:

Driving to and from work these past few weeks I have noticed that most of the pastures are filling up with cattle. I enjoy this time of year and being able to watch the visual changes in both the cattle and the grass they graze. These changes are concrete and noticeable; they are something that can be defined by height and weight in the animals, protein and lignin content in the forage.

Wabaunsee County cattlemen are responsible for caring for both of these entities, and they do a wonderful job of it. Our county is known for their achievements and accomplishments in this regard. Have you ever pondered, though, what else Wabaunsee County cattlemen bring to the table (besides your beef)?

Recent studies identified by [Explorebeef.org](http://Explorebeef.org) indicate that 97% of all beef cattle ranches are family owned, with 54% of them being in the same family for three or more generations. That means beef has been keeping kids, or bringing kids back after college, to Wabaunsee County for over 75 years. Also, two-thirds of those ranches would like to continue and plan to pass down their ranching operation to future generations.

Perhaps due to their strong roots and ties in the community, cattlemen are more likely to vote in national, state and local elections (94% vs. 64% of the general population), as well as run for an elected office. Also, their participation in the military has shown to be higher (24% versus 14% national average).

On an economic level, cattlemen contribute greatly in several ways. Even if it is on a temporary or part-time basis, cattlemen employ friends and neighbors several times a year for a variety of activities (processing, shipping, etc.). They support local businesses by purchasing feed and fuel nearby, typically within a 100 mile radius. Similarly, cattlemen (or their better halves) shop at the local grocery store, hardware store, and occasionally, clothing store. These small businesses keep our local communities thriving and help to generate tax revenue.

Arguably one of their most important contributions, cattlemen, like many others in our small communities, volunteer. The national average of folks that volunteer is 7%, compared to 47% of cattlemen. 4-H and FFA are the most commonly supported organizations, although certainly not the only youth organizations cattlemen devote their abundance of "extra" time to. Cattlemen certainly don't limit themselves to youth organizations, however. They volunteer their time with other community organizations (34%) and contribute to their churches (84%). Volunteering for these numerous activities and organizations comprises an average of 11 hours per month for the typical cattleman.

The next time you drive down the road and admire the pastures full of cattle, remember the cattlemen that are responsible for them. Then take a moment to think of everything else they contribute to their communities beyond beef. This May, which is National Beef Month, take a moment to thank a local cattleman. In this area, you won't have to look too long to find a great one.