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A Road to More Sustainable Beef

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ABSTRACT In general, holistic approaches are required to overcome the barriers to more sustainable practices. This involves treating problems not individually, but as parts of larger more complex systems. This basic guideline is true of the beef industry in the United States. The advent of industrialized beef production and distribution has caused widespread decline in other areas of the beef industry, most notably small-scale and grass-fed ranching methods. While this was originally viewed as a natural shift to a more efficient system, it has come to light over the past three decades that there are significant environmental, economic and social concerns associated with the industrialized nature of the industry. These concerns are associated with, but not limited to, environmental degradation, economic consolidation, recession of community involvement, impacts to human health, and overall loss of diversity in the system as a whole. This report explores the nature of those concerns, the current state and trends of the beef industry in the United States, and proposes systematic changes that could allow the U.S. beef industry to develop in a more environmentally, economically and socially sustainable manner.

Keywords: sustainability, environment, beef, CAFO, local, grass-fed