

Global Roundtable for Sustainable Beef Principles and Criteria Background

The Global Roundtable for Sustainable Beef (GRSB) is a multi-stakeholder initiative with representation across the beef value chain. Through the process of broad-based engagement and various internal and external reviews, the Principles and Criteria were developed as a means to define sustainable beef in the context of the mission and vision of GRSB.

Vision

We envision a world in which all aspects of the beef value chain are environmentally sound, socially responsible and economically viable.

Mission

The mission of GRSB is to advance continuous improvement in global beef value chain sustainability, through leadership, science, and multi-stakeholder engagement and collaboration.

Principles and Criteria Background

The General Assembly of the Global Roundtable for Sustainable Beef (GRSB) has voted to ratify the first global principles and criteria for sustainable beef and beef production practices. The principles and criteria define GRSB's view of sustainable beef, at a high level in a manner that builds upon GRSB's vision and mission. It therefore deliberately addresses the categories of Principles and Criteria only and avoids the equally important, but more context-specific levels of indicators, metrics or practices better defined at a more local, regional or national level.

GRSB took this high-level approach because, although this broader definition of sustainable beef may have global validity, it is clear that at the lower level, context-specific elements including indicators and metrics may only apply in a narrow range of environments and systems and therefore need to be developed at the local level. Work is underway in various countries and regions to determine what is locally relevant to fit under the Principles and Criteria presented here, and GRSB will continue to work with national and regional groups to extend this effort.

GRSB Principles and Criteria Q&A

- 1) Q: Will this work lead to a GRSB certification system or other mandated beef production protocols or practices?

A: No. The GRSB's Principles and Criteria are designed to provide a framework that defines sustainable beef production. There are many environments and systems where beef is being produced sustainably and GRSB does not believe that a universal certification protocol or set of production practices can be applied to all of them. A one-size-fits-all approach to beef production will not work to improve industry sustainability.

2) Q: How can these Principles and Criteria lead to a more sustainable beef industry?

A: By establishing these Principles and Criteria as a framework through a broad-based multi-stakeholder platform, we garner the commitment of those same stakeholders to work toward a goal of continuous improvement. GRSB will support stakeholders' own initiatives to improve sustainability, enabling them to make choices appropriate to their individual system and environment.

3) Q: Do these Principles and Criteria duplicate what other groups have already done?

A: This is the first set of Principles and Criteria developed with full value chain, multi-stakeholder participation across major beef production regions. We have deliberately avoided duplicating the more detailed metrics or management practices developed by others, as we see them as contributing to the same goal.

4) Q: How can you monitor and evaluate progress or measure impact without certification?

A: Sharing information regarding sustainability practices along the value chain can support stakeholders while demonstrating and documenting initiatives that contribute to the goal of continuous improvement over time. GRSB welcomes input on the development of systems to demonstrate what is already being done to improve sustainability throughout the value chain.

5) Q: Why is there no mention of specific beef production practices and/or issues?

A: There is a wide range of sustainability issues that are relevant to beef production, processing, related services and retail. Some are of importance in one set of circumstances and much less relevant in another. It would not help stakeholders to try to include all such issues at a global level. National or regional groups are in a much better position to identify and prioritize the specific issues and practices that fit within GRSB's Principles and Criteria. Those same groups are also better positioned to align relevant indicators in an effort to enhance sustainability. Work is already underway to support existing roundtables such as the Brazilian Roundtable for Sustainable Livestock (GTPS) in Brazil and the Canadian Roundtable for Sustainable Beef (CRSB) in Canada, and the emergence of national roundtables in other important producer countries to further these efforts and support the adoption of practices that contribute to improved sustainability.

- 6) Q: We (producers, processors, retailers) are overrun with regulations already, why do you want to add another layer of requirements?

A: Regulation differs widely between countries and regions and is concerned with many issues beyond sustainability. In some cases regulations may be at odds with efforts to improve beef industry sustainability. Where legislation already covers everything within given Principles and Criteria GRSB sees no advantage in a parallel system. However, in order to level the sustainability playing field and to support stakeholders, GRSB does see value in encouraging improvements in areas (both geographical and sectoral) where legislation is not yet in place, and in supporting continuous improvement amongst stakeholders.

- 7) Q: Implementing these principles and criteria will cost money – who is going to pay for it?

A: There may be upfront costs in the implementation of some practices that contribute to improved sustainability. However, it is important to remember that sustainability includes an economic component that must be considered when developing practices and protocols. Balancing change with economic considerations is important for all facets of beef production. Changes that don't add value to the beef community are not sustainable in the long-term. As a result, an approach that balances all three components of sustainability -- environmental, social and economic -- is required when making changes to the beef value chain.

- 8) Q: Why do the principles and criteria not require grass-fed / organic / other specific systems or practices?

A: The global beef industry encompasses a very wide range of systems, which are adapted to a wide range of physical and policy environments. Favouring one system or set of production practices over another could have negative consequences. We believe that all production systems have a role to play in the global production of beef to meet the needs of a growing population and suit the varying demands of global consumers. Similarly, we believe every individual producer and operation has a role to play in contributing to improved sustainability.

- 9) Q: Why is there no mention of reducing beef consumption in these principles and criteria?

A: Demand for beef is increasing predominantly in developing countries; consumption per-capita is falling in North America and Europe. It is rising in countries where overall levels of beef consumption have been low and where additional meat protein in the diet can contribute to improved health. The

stakeholders in the roundtable have come together voluntarily to improve the sustainability of the industry in which they are involved, and their continued participation is needed if the roundtable is to have impact.

10) Q: Beef production cannot be sustainable; aren't these principles and criteria just industry greenwash?

A: GRSB does not agree that beef production cannot be sustainable. Ruminant animals have played an extremely important role in creating the world we live in and are the primary means we have of converting grassland, which is unsuitable for farming or products that are not readily consumed, into high-quality protein and other products for human consumption. However, we equally recognize that sustainability is not always built into business models. GRSB believes the sustainability of beef production must improve continuously if we are to avoid catastrophic problems in the future as we work to meet the growing global demand for protein. Any effort to improve the sustainability of our food production, processing and distribution systems should be encouraged. With an increasing population, campaigning against increased food production makes no sense. The only constructive approach is to produce our food as efficiently as possible and minimize potential negative social and environmental impacts.