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“Beef About Beef”-  
Politics and Culture of Beef Consumption:  
A Case Study of Nebraska: “The Beef State” of the USA



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### Abstract:

The production and consumption of beef is having profound effects on global warming and the current climate crisis. Through an evaluation of government, mainstream media and farming organisations and social media, this dissertation considers the impact of politics and culture on meat consumption through the lens of Nebraska, the “Beef State” of the United States of America. The dissertation is divided into three parts. Chapter 1 will examine the role of the local Nebraskan government and the link between their Republican political stance and their push for beef consumption. Chapter 2 will consider mainstream media and farming organisations perspectives on the cattle vs climate issue, with the final chapter homing in on a more local perspective through the evaluation of Nebraskan social media. The chapters demonstrate the indisputable links between politics and culture in Nebraska and their key influence on the consumption of beef. The dissertation concludes that beef is inextricably intertwined in the traditional all-American society and that “Beef State”, Nebraska represents a wider American “Beef Battle”.

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## Introduction- "Beef: It's What's For Dinner"<sup>1</sup>

Four years ago, I made the decision to stop eating red meat for environmental reasons. This has been the main inspiration for this dissertation as I wanted to delve deeper into the politics and culture behind beef consumption. In recent years our diet has been called into question by scientists and researchers who have started to highlight 'the need for changes to food consumption in order to achieve the required greenhouse gas (GHG) reductions', that were established at the United Nations Paris Conference in 2015.<sup>2</sup> The EAT-Lancet Commission have concluded that, the consumption of red meat on a global scale, is currently much higher than what it considers to be healthy and sustainable.<sup>3</sup> Globally, livestock farming accounts for '15% of total anthropogenic GHG [Greenhouse Gas] emissions and is the primary anthropogenic source of CH<sub>4</sub> [methane] and N<sub>2</sub>O [nitrous oxide] emissions, producing around 50 and 60% respectively', causing a direct impact on climate change and a global warming crisis.<sup>4</sup> Beef's contribution to this current climate crisis is 'by far the biggest offender, generating 60 kilograms of greenhouse gas emissions per kilogram of meat produced- more than twice the emissions of the next most polluting food, lamb'.<sup>5</sup> The consumption of beef must be evaluated by looking at the political and cultural significance behind it rather than the importance of its nutritional value. The traditional and cultural motivations behind meat consumption is deep-rooted in countries such as the

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<sup>1</sup> Title quotation taken from: Steve White, "Beef about Beef: Battle Highlights Meat's Importance in Politics," *NTV News*, April 1, 2021, <https://nebraska.tv/news/ntvs-grow/beef-about-beef-battle-highlights-meats-importance-in-politics>. ; Introduction title quotation taken from: "Beef: It's What's for Dinner", accessed May 12, 2022, <https://www.beefitswhatsfordinner.com/>.

<sup>2</sup> Helen Harwatt, Joan Sabaté, Gidon Eshel, Sam Soret, and William Ripple, "Substituting Beans for Beef as A Contribution Toward US Climate Change Targets," *Climatic Change* 143, no.1-2, (2017): 261.

<sup>3</sup> "What is the Climate Impact of Eating Meat and Dairy?" *CarbonBrief: Clear on Climate*, accessed 12 May, 2022, <https://interactive.carbonbrief.org/what-is-the-climate-impact-of-eating-meat-and-dairy/>.

<sup>4</sup> Harwatt, Sabaté, Eshel, Soret, and Ripple, "Substituting Beans for Beef," 262.

<sup>5</sup> David Vetter, "Got Beef? Here's What Your Hamburger Is Doing To The Climate," *Forbes*, October 5, 2020, <https://www.forbes.com/sites/davidvetter/2020/10/05/got-beef-heres-what-your-hamburger-is-doing-to-the-climate/?sh=573b4415206f>.

United States of America (USA). Consequently, statistics such as those shown in Figure 1 are of little concern to the US, the world's largest consumer of beef.<sup>6</sup> Meat is an essential part of the all-American diet and contributes to American identity, 'Americans celebrate their independence with sizzling sausages and gives thanks with turkey'.<sup>7</sup> Meat eating is therefore embedded into the roots of American culture. The average American ate roughly 220 pounds of meat in 2018, which is a new record.<sup>8</sup> In terms of both the

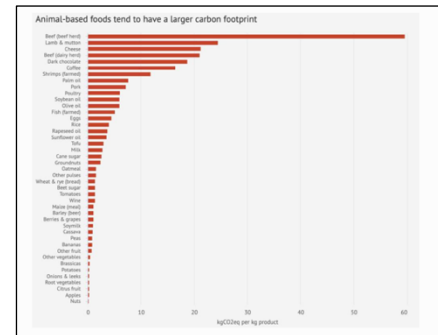


Figure 1. Greenhouse gas emissions per kilogram for different food groups, by Poore & Nemecek (2018). From *CarbonBrief: Clear on Climate*, <https://interactive.carbonbrief.org/what-is-the-climate-impact-of-eating-meat-and-dairy/>.

economy and American tradition, the production of cattle in the USA is therefore the most important agricultural industry. It is undeniable that beef will always be a significant part of American culture 'the heart of America beats in the same rhythm as agriculture'.<sup>9</sup> Beef's contribution to the American diet is ever present, 'when you think about American food, beef is what is in the centre of that plate'.<sup>10</sup> However, a new contemporary environmental movement scrutinises this culturally significant food. America's reaction to this environmental movement, including Trump's decision to withdraw from the 2015 Paris Climate Agreement demonstrates their disregard of impact that beef is having on the planet and highlights their concern over the protection of their all-American, traditional diet. However, it is about time that Americans stop and think about the impact their precious beef industry is having on our planet. The link between climate and cattle is ever-growing and must be addressed. The cattle industry, due to animal waste,

<sup>6</sup> "Sector at a Glance," US Department of Agriculture, last modified April 22, 2022, <https://www.ers.usda.gov/topics/animal-products/cattle-beef/sector-at-a-glance/#:~:text=The%20U.S.%20beef%20industry%20is,value%2C%20grain%2Dfed%20beef.>

<sup>7</sup> Eleanor Cummins, "America's Obsession with Meat, Explained: Here's The Beef," *Popular Science*, October 28, 2019, <https://www.popsoci.com/why-americans-eat-so-much-meat/>.

<sup>8</sup> Cummins, "America's Obsession with Meat, Explained."

<sup>9</sup> Deb Fischer, "America's Beef Producers Are Not Villains- Here's What Anti-Meat Advocates Just Don't Get," *Fox News*, November 1, 2019, <https://www.foxnews.com/opinion/americas-beef-producers-anti-meat-advocates-sen-deb-fisher>.

<sup>10</sup> Thomas Beaumont and Scott McFetridge, "Red Meat Politics: GOP Turns Culture War into a Food Fight," *ABC News*, May 7, 2021, <https://abcnews.go.com/Politics/wireStory/red-meat-politics-gop-turns-culture-war-food-77549428>.

deforestation, and land degradation, ultimately contributes to climate change by releasing vast quantities of GHG's such as carbon dioxide and methane into the atmosphere. In turn, this impacts farming conditions such as temperature changes and soil condition, it is therefore in the best interest of farming and cattle ranchers to address the impact their industry is having on the planet and look towards a more sustainable future.

For local governments in the US, the motivations behind cattle production can often be considered to have political incentives. Alternatively, for farming organisations, cattle production is about more than votes, it contributes to the stability of their livelihoods. This dissertation will evaluate how political and cultural stances influence meat consumption and the different incentives that different groups may have regarding combating rising global warming through the reduction of red meat. Farming organisations, whilst promoting cattle production, tend to acknowledge the impact of their industry on the climate, as a change in climate consequently effects their production and thus their livelihoods. Contrastingly, local governments may use the production of meat to attract all-American traditional voters. One such example of this, is in "Beef State", Nebraska.<sup>11</sup> The link between the political status of US states and their beef consumption is inextricable, 'democrats are much more likely to shy away from meat than Republicans are'.<sup>12</sup> Nebraska is a prime example of a highly Republican state that is encouraging the vast consumption of red meat and the increasing production of cattle, despite climate concerns.

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<sup>11</sup> "Nebraska: The Beef State: State & National Facts," Nebraska Beef Council, accessed January 24, 2022, <https://www.nebeef.org/raising-beef/state-national-facts>. (Any reference to the "Beef State" will be a shorthand reference to Nebraska).

<sup>12</sup> "American Dietary Preferences Are Split Across Party Lines," *The Economist*, November 22, 2018, <https://www.economist.com/graphic-detail/2018/11/22/american-dietary-preferences-are-split-across-party-lines>.



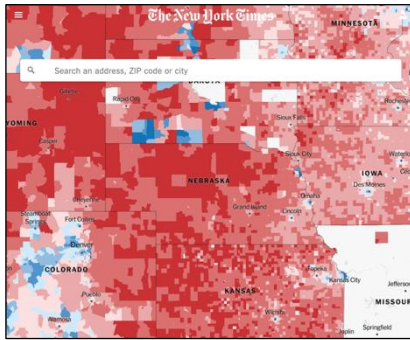


Figure 2. Political map of United States of America, 2020, by Alice Park, Charlie Smart, Rumsey Taylor and Miles Watkins. From The New York Times, <https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2021/upshot/2020-election-map.html>.

The Republican (red) state of Nebraska, as seen by Figure 2, is centered around an all-American lifestyle including American food culture. This traditional American way of life has come under scrutiny from environmentalists causing a “Beef Battle” in Nebraska, consisting of retaliation campaigns between meat eaters and environmentalists.<sup>13</sup> The two sides of the battle include, ‘meathead’, Republican Governor of Nebraska, Pete Ricketts and his local government against a rising force of environmentalists and supporters of plant-based

alternatives.<sup>14</sup> This dissertation will evaluate the cultural and political motivations behind meat consumption in Nebraska, and what is being said about the potential need for a decline in cattle production, looking at the debate between cattle vs climate. Nebraska’s label of the “Beef State” of America and it’s Republican, meat loving local government makes it the perfect example for this study, as the traditional American culture is being challenged for the sake of the planet. Nebraska can be looked at as a wider example for the larger “Beef Battle” throughout the entirety of the USA. The rise of environmentalism and veganism has caused the billion-dollar beef industry to feel threatened, and the issue in Nebraska stands as a depiction of the wider American cattle vs climate issue. As I shall address in Chapter 2, national mainstream media channels have commented on the beef issue in Nebraska- using it as a reference to their own beef struggles and the wider struggle throughout America. This highlights Nebraska’s symbolic position in representing a wider all-American issue. The “Meat War... Waged Across State Lines” between Nebraska and neighbouring, more Democratic state, Colorado speaks to something bigger.<sup>15</sup> Agriculture economist

<sup>13</sup> Jon Kipper, “Beef Battle: As Bill Gates Urges the US to Move Away from Beef, Nebraska Politicians Urge Residents to Eat it,” *3 News Now*, March 8, 2021, <https://www.3newsnow.com/news/local-news/beef-battle-as-bill-gates-urges-the-us-to-move-away-from-beef-nebraska-politicians-urge-residents-to-eat-it>. (The term “Beef Battle” has become a general term used in the beef vs climate crisis and I shall continue to use it as such)

<sup>14</sup> Steve White, “Beef about Beef: Battle Highlights Meat’s Importance in Politics,” *NTV News*, April 1, 2021, <https://nebraska.tv/news/ntvs-grow/beef-about-beef-battle-highlights-meats-importance-in-politics>.

<sup>15</sup> Mario Fazio, “Meat War Is Waged Across State Lines,” *The New York Times*, March 16, 2021, <https://www.nytimes.com/2021/03/16/us/meatout-day-colorado-nebraska.html>.

at Iowa State University, Chad Hart states, for some, 'it's hard to imagine Americans abandoning beef and easy to see its power as a political symbol'.<sup>16</sup> This can be said for Governor of Nebraska, Pete Ricketts who has utilised beef as a way to appeal to traditional, all-American Republicans in order to secure votes.

This investigation aims to assess the political and cultural motivation behind meat consumption, using "Beef State" Nebraska as a case study reference. Throughout this dissertation I have used evidence from national, local government and local sources such as social media to ensure different perspectives of the "Beef Battle". Looking at Nebraskan local government perspective provides evidence for the political motivations behind the promotion of beef consumption. The evidence used from mainstream media sources including from national news channels supports the idea of the Nebraskan "Beef Battle" being representative of a wider national issue. Finally, using evidence found on Nebraskan social media I will be evaluating a more local and non-politicised view of the cattle vs climate issue.

This dissertation will firstly evaluate the motivations behind the local Nebraskan government's push for red meat. What do they gain from encouraging such vast meat consumption? Secondly, I will be looking at the stance of mainstream media and their reports on cattle vs climate alongside the more local perspectives of farming organisations whose livelihoods depend not only on cattle production but on the sustainability of cattle farming. Cattle production is a generational farming system in the USA, it therefore relies heavily on cattle farming being sustainable, on an environmental, social and economic level. Finally, I will be discussing what social media, such as Instagram, Spotify Podcasts and Facebook has to say about cattle vs climate and looking at the recent escalation in Veganism and Vegetarianism trends online and how this has affected meat consumption. I will be looking at all these perspectives mainly, in the context of the "Beef State" Nebraska.

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<sup>16</sup> "Red Meat Politics: GOP Turns Culture War Into a Food Fight," *Independent*, May 7, 2021, <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/americas/us-politics/red-meat-politics-gop-turns-culture-war-into-a-food-fight-joe-biden-americans-iowa-democrats-greg-abbott-b1843574.html>.

## Chapter 1: "Beef State" to "Bean State"?

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The 2009 World Watch Report on Livestock and Climate Change, published by the United Nations stated that 'livestock causes 51% of annual worldwide GHG [Greenhouse Gas] emissions', with the United States contributing to this significantly, as the 'world's largest producer of beef'.<sup>2</sup> In 2019, agriculture made up 10% of the United States greenhouse gas emissions.<sup>3</sup> Contributing to a noteworthy proportion of agricultural GHG emissions in the USA is "Beef State", Nebraska. Nebraska is one of the top five states for agricultural output, as well as being a large producer of grain and corn, it's especially known for its cattle production.<sup>4</sup> Beef production is 'the worst climate offender in the agricultural sector'.<sup>5</sup> Consequently, Nebraska is a large contributor to the release of the harmful GHG, methane, into the atmosphere, contributing to a global 'climate crisis'.<sup>6</sup> Beef is a considerable part of Nebraska's identity and remains a unique selling point for tourists as it represents the epitome of an all-American diet culture. Beef is therefore a substantial asset to the Nebraskan economy- making the promotion of beef crucial to their livelihoods. Activists promoting the growing environmental concerns surrounding beef production are starting to challenge the local government's push for beef.

As the climate crisis continues to intensify, causing extreme heat, drought, and flooding, Nebraska's agricultural conditions are slowly diminishing. Nebraska's

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<sup>1</sup> "Nebraska: The Beef State: State & National Facts," Nebraska Beef Council, accessed January 24, 2022, <https://www.nebeef.org/raising-beef/state-national-facts>.

<sup>2</sup> Robert Goodland and Jeff Anhang, "Livestock and Climate Change," *World Watch* 23, no. 2 (December 2009): 11 ; "Cattle and Beef," US Department of Agriculture, last modified March 10, 2022, <https://www.ers.usda.gov/topics/animal-products/cattle-beef.aspx>.

<sup>3</sup> "Sources of Greenhouse Gas Emissions," United States Environmental Protection Agency, accessed February 22, 2022, <https://www.epa.gov/ghgemissions/sources-greenhouse-gas-emissions>.

<sup>4</sup> "Nebraska," Climate Change Resources, accessed January 28, 2022, <https://climatechangeresources.org/nebraska/>.

<sup>5</sup> Michael Grunwald, "Inside the Race to Build the Burger of the Future," *Politico Magazine*, April 1, 2019, <https://www.politico.com/magazine/story/2019/04/01/meat-politics-226342/>.

<sup>6</sup> "Nebraska."

livestock are reliant on optimum crop growth conditions, however climate change has resulted in 'warmer climates and less soil moisture', in the state, putting their agricultural dependent economy at risk.<sup>7</sup> Consequently, one could argue it is in Nebraska's best interest to consider the impacts of their agricultural production on climate change. However, 'legislators have resisted implementing policy that would help the state prepare for the coming climate challenges and the state lacks an adaptation plan'.<sup>8</sup> The local government's discouragement of plant-based diets to help decrease Nebraskan's meat consumption, alongside their desire to protect Nebraska's status as the "Beef State" makes them culpable for the lack of climate action being taken in Nebraska. The motivations behind the local government's push for cattle farming in Nebraska is likely because of their deep-rooted Republican ideas of a traditional all-American culture. However, given that the Nebraskan livestock industry is valued at \$11.9 billion and additionally, \$3.5 billion in grain is consumed annually by Nebraska livestock, the economic motivations for cattle production cannot be overlooked.<sup>9</sup>

Meat consumption in US states has turned political. In the "Beef State", the local government have started to face challenges concerning the beef heavy diets of Nebraskans. Local government's priority is keeping beef as an essential part of Nebraskan diets to maintain their traditional American "Beef State" status and sustain their agricultural dependent economy; however, environmentalists dispute this stance. Recent growing environmental movements have raised alarm bells about the contribution of beef production to GHG emissions, causing a concern for Nebraskan local government. Specifically demonstrating his concern for growing environmental movements, is Republican Governor of Nebraska, Pete Ricketts who has become 'so worried that people might eat vegetable proteins that he is

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<sup>7</sup> "Nebraska."

<sup>8</sup> "Nebraska."

<sup>9</sup> "Supporting Nebraska's Livestock Industry," Nebraska Department of Agriculture, accessed January 24, 2022, [https://nda.nebraska.gov/promotion/livestock\\_friendly/lfc\\_brochure.pdf](https://nda.nebraska.gov/promotion/livestock_friendly/lfc_brochure.pdf)



Figure 3. Nebraska Beef Passport 2022. From Nebraska Beef Council, <https://www.nebeef.org/good-life-great-steaks-beef-passport-program>.

endorsing a special “passport” for enthusiastic beef eaters’.<sup>10</sup> Ricketts has implemented the ‘Good Life Great Steaks Beef Passport Program’ in partnership with the Nebraska Beef Council. Red-meat lovers who buy beef at any of the 41 cow-serving restaurants in the state are awarded stamps (digitally or via booklets) to enabling them to enter raffles.<sup>11</sup> Top prizes such as \$500 beef bundles and *Beef. It’s What’s For Dinner* merchandise can be won.<sup>12</sup> Those with over 30 stamps are even awarded a place on the Beef Passport Hall of Fame and given deals on extra beef products.<sup>13</sup> The initiative for the

program is to support Nebraskan ranchers and to ‘protect Nebraska’s economy from radical environmentalists’ who have begun encouraging plant-based alternatives.<sup>14</sup> Ricketts has disregarded any environmental impact of Nebraskan’s precious beef industry stating, ‘who wants to eat three glasses of quinoa anyway?’.<sup>15</sup> Additionally, some may argue that Ricketts may have his own motivations for the success of the beef industry in Nebraska. According to data from the National Institute on Money in Politics, Ricketts ‘received at least \$25,000 in contributions from James Timmerman, Vice President for Administration... of Nebraska Beef, Ltd’, as one of several donations.<sup>16</sup> This alone could contribute to ulterior motives behind Ricketts’ rally against environmentalists. Nebraska Cattlemen Association (NCA) and the Nebraska Beef Council, part of the National Cattlemen’s Beef Association are a ‘powerful group... [with] a strong voice in

<sup>10</sup> Josh Israel, “Nebraska governor bribes people to eat more meat with ‘beef passport’ and prizes,” *The American Independent*, May 7, 2021, <https://americanindependent.com/nebraska-governor-pete-ricketts-republican-beef-industry-donations-passport/>.

<sup>11</sup> Israel, “Nebraska governor bribes people to eat more meat.”

<sup>12</sup> “Nebraska Beef Passport Program,” Nebraska Beef Council, accessed March 5, 2022, <https://www.nebeef.org/good-life-great-steaks-beef-passport-program>.

<sup>13</sup> “Nebraska Beef Passport Program.”

<sup>14</sup> Israel, “Nebraska governor bribes people to eat more meat.”

<sup>15</sup> Israel, “Nebraska governor bribes people to eat more meat.”

<sup>16</sup> Israel, “Nebraska governor bribes people to eat more meat.”

decision making', in the American meat industry.<sup>17</sup> These influential organisations have thanked Ricketts and the local government for 'declaring May as "Beef Month" ...hop(ing) everyone celebrates with beef today- and everyday', highlighting national support for the beef cause.<sup>18</sup> However, their stance leans more towards acknowledging action towards climate change compared to Ricketts' unwavering views. The Nebraskan local government do not only endorse meat consumption but enthusiastically encourage it, ignoring any environmentally friendly alternatives. Democratic lawmakers in Nebraska, whilst not actively against beef production, have shown aversion towards 'Prickly Pete', and the hierarchy of beef companies in Nebraska.<sup>19</sup> Similarly to Ricketts, President Trump has been quoted as saying 'Democrats and environmental wackos are waging a war on beef'.<sup>20</sup> In reality, Democrats are merely pushing for a more sustainable beef process rather than the eradication of meat. Given that four companies control 80% of the nation's beef, Joe Biden and the Democratic party in Nebraska have released 'plans to crack down on consolidation in the meat industry'.<sup>21</sup> United States Agriculture Secretary, Tom Vilsack has sent funds to a local group of Nebraskans to fund the building of an independent meatpacking plant in western Nebraska called Sustainable Beef Farm. The introduction of smaller-sized processing plants will prevent the hierarchy and mass-produced meat in Nebraska- encouraging smaller and more sustainable ranches.

The fight in Nebraska is symbolic of the wider political party differences in the USA. Trump's decision to pull out of the 2015 Paris Agreement and his claim that global climate change is 'a hoax', highlights their blinkered and traditional

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<sup>17</sup> Steve Johnson, "The Politics of Meat: A Look at the Meat Industry's Influence on Capitol Hill," *Frontline Newsletter*, accessed January 29, 2022, <https://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/shows/meat/politics/>.

<sup>18</sup> Israel, "Nebraska governor bribes people to eat more meat."

<sup>19</sup> "Prickly Pete and More," *Nebraska Democratic Party News*, December 10, 2021, <https://nebraskademocrats.org/blog/prickly-pete-and-more-nebdems-news/>.

<sup>20</sup> Grunwald, "Inside the Race to Build the Burger of the Future."

<sup>21</sup> "Help is on the way for rural Nebraska thanks to President Joe Biden and Democrats," *Nebraska Democratic Party News*, January 27, 2022, <https://nebraskademocrats.org/blog/help-is-on-the-way-for-rural-nebraska-thanks-to-president-joe-biden-and-democrats/>.

perspectives on climate change.<sup>22</sup> Ricketts takes a similar stance in Nebraska, neglecting all possibility that his precious meat industry may be contributing to a climate crisis. Democrats are much more aligned with international concerns around climate change and several Democratic lawmakers have been seen to address the situation and take action. Consequently, 'the meat industry in the United States is a powerful political force'.<sup>23</sup> Republicans, in recent years have argued that Democrats are trying to 'change Americans' diets, and therefore, their lives', by moving away from traditional American food choices such as beef which is often identified to 'remain a national identity when it comes to what an American food plate looks like'.<sup>24</sup> In a 2019 Gallup poll, about 30% of Democrats...were eating less meat than they had a year earlier, compared to 12% of Republicans, several stemming from environmental concerns.<sup>25</sup> Democrats have started to contend that Americans 'shouldn't be eating a hamburger for breakfast, lunch and dinner'.<sup>26</sup> This is a call for a reduction of red-meat in the all-American diet, not the eradication- 'no Democrats are pushing to confiscate cows'.<sup>27</sup> However, Republicans have taken this as a culture war arguing that cattle grazing is 'quintessentially American' and just as 'central to American culture as cars or sports'.<sup>28</sup> Nebraska is a majority Republican state, so therefore embodies the traditional American cultural behaviours including their food choices. As the 2021 elections highlighted 'America's rural heartland stuck firmly with Donald Trump'.<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> Mark Joyella, "On Fox, Donald Trump Calls Climate Change a 'Hoax': 'In The 1920's They Were Talking About Global Freezing,'" *Forbes Magazine*, March 21, 2022, <https://www.forbes.com/sites/markjoyella/2022/03/21/on-fox-donald-trump-calls-climate-change-a-hoax-in-the-1920s-they-were-talking-about-global-freezing/>.

<sup>23</sup> Johnson, "The Politics of Meat." ; Thomas Beaumont and Scott McFetridge, "Red Meat Politics: GOP Turns Culture War into a Food Fight," *ABC News*, May 7, 2021, <https://abcnews.go.com/Politics/wireStory/red-meat-politics-gop-turns-culture-war-food-77549428>.

<sup>24</sup> Beaumont and McFetridge, "Red Meat Politics."

<sup>25</sup> Beaumont and McFetridge, "Red Meat Politics."

<sup>26</sup> Grunwald, "Inside the Race to Build the Burger of the Future."

<sup>27</sup> Grunwald, "Inside the Race to Build the Burger of the Future."

<sup>28</sup> Beaumont and McFetridge, "Red Meat Politics."; Grunwald, "Inside the Race to Build the Burger of the Future."

<sup>29</sup> Chris McGreal, "Democrats Fail To Persuade Swaths of Rural America's Heartlands," *The Guardian*, November 4, 2020, <https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2020/nov/04/democrats-fail-persuade-rural-america-heartlands-us-election-2020-trump>.



Red states such as Nebraska voted for Trump with the reasoning that he was 'good for the economy and farm families... He supports agriculture better'.<sup>30</sup> Environmentalists and new ideas about meat's contribution to climate change challenges the traditional, 'conventional food animal production systems'.<sup>31</sup> Pete Ricketts was among the first to slam climate-minded Democrats. In Nebraska, the fight back against environmentalists has become increasingly political and paranoid. "Meatless Monday" is an international campaign which encourages people to not eat meat on Mondays, however it is not international law.<sup>32</sup> Nevertheless, Republican party lawmakers in April 2021 filed a bill that would 'prohibit federal agencies from forcing patrons in their cafeterias to observe "meatless Mondays"'.<sup>33</sup> Further overreaction against the Left's 'War on Meat', can be seen by the Republican denouncement of a 'non-existent plan by President Joe Biden to get rid of hamburgers to combat climate change'.<sup>34</sup> Such uncompromising political stance by the Republicans may have resulted in them overlooking that Nebraska's economy also relies on vegetables- not just meat. As well as the "Beef State", Nebraska is sometimes referred to at the 'Cornhusker State'.<sup>35</sup> In terms of revenue, corn and soybeans are in the top five of Nebraska's most important crops, symbolising the importance and reliance of Nebraskan economy on other forms of agriculture than just meat.

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<sup>30</sup> McGreal, "Democrats Fail To Persuade Swaths of Rural America's Heartlands."

<sup>31</sup> James Drouillard, "Current situation and future trends for beef production in the United States of America - A review," *Asian-Australasian Journal of Animal Sciences* 31, no. 7 (2018): 1013.

<sup>32</sup> Israel, "Nebraska governor bribes people to eat more meat."

<sup>33</sup> Israel, "Nebraska governor bribes people to eat more meat."

<sup>34</sup> Israel, "Nebraska governor bribes people to eat more meat."

<sup>35</sup> "Facts on Nebraskan Agriculture," Nebraska Department of Agriculture, accessed January 24, 2022, [https://nda.nebraska.gov/publications/ne\\_ag\\_facts\\_brochure.pdf](https://nda.nebraska.gov/publications/ne_ag_facts_brochure.pdf).



Ricketts and his Republican rooted party stand as the main opposition against cutting down meat consumption in Nebraska. In an official Nebraskan government press release, Ricketts publicly slandered environmental lobbying groups arguing that they are 'anti-agriculture' and if they continued to promote the reduction of cattle in American diets, they 'would destroy [their] way of life', urging Nebraskans to rise up and stand with the livestock producers across Nebraska.<sup>36</sup> This Nebraskan beef revolution, led by Ricketts, was largely triggered by Colorado's announcement of a "MeatOut Day", launched in March 2021.<sup>37</sup> Colorado's Democratic governor Jared Polis launched the movement with aspirations of both improving health and reducing environmental damage through the reduction of beef in American diets. Much like the Democratic party in Nebraska, Polis 'still supports the meat industry', but aspires to cut greenhouse gases through one meat-free day.<sup>38</sup> In turn, this caused a political 'Meat War...Across State Lines', with neighbour: Nebraska.<sup>39</sup> In retaliation to "MeatOut Day", Ricketts launched "Meat on the Menu Day" to support the "Beef State's" industry and push back against animal rights activists.<sup>40</sup> Ricketts claimed



Figure 4. State Of Nebraska "Meat On The Menu Day" Proclamation, by Pete Ricketts. From NTV News, March 18, 2022, <https://www.klntv.com/nebraska-gov-pete-ricketts-declares-another-meat-on-the-menu-day/>.

<sup>36</sup> "Let's Stand Up for Nebraska's Family Farmers," Official Nebraska Government Website, September 10, 2019, <https://governor.nebraska.gov/press/gov-ricketts-let%E2%80%99s-stand-nebraska%E2%80%99s-family-farmers>.

<sup>37</sup> "Nebraska Takes Aim at Colorado's Meat-free Day by Declaring Pro-Meat Day," *The Guardian*, March 15, 2021, <https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2021/mar/15/nebraska-colorado-meatless-day-beef-industry>. (The term "MeatOut Day" has become a general term used in the beef vs climate crisis and I shall continue to use it as such).

<sup>38</sup> "Gov. Polis Proclaims Saturday as "Meat Out Day:" Spurs "Meat In Day" from other side," *KKTV News*, March 2, 2021, <https://www.kktv.com/2021/03/20/gov-polis-proclaims-saturday-as-meat-out-day-spurs-meat-in-day-from-other-side/>.

<sup>39</sup> Marie Fazio, "A Meat War Is Waged Across State Lines," *New York Times*, March 16, 2021, <https://www.nytimes.com/2021/03/16/us/meatout-day-colorado-nebraska.html>.

<sup>40</sup> "Nebraska Takes Aim at Colorado's Meat-free Day by Declaring Pro-Meat Day." (The term "Meat on the Menu Day" has become a general term used in the beef vs climate crisis and I shall continue to use it as such).

"MeatOut Day" was a 'direct attack on [their] way of life', arguing that agriculture and the meat industry was 'the backbone of Nebraska's economy'.<sup>41</sup> Agriculture supports one out of every four jobs in the state, generating \$21 billion annually, 'when agriculture does well, Nebraska does well'.<sup>42</sup> Ricketts therefore claims that "MeatOut Day" undermines Nebraska's food security. This highlights Ricketts' economic motivations to keep the beef industry alive and not allow any meat alternatives to flourish in Nebraska. Ricketts' press release: "Let's Stand Up For Nebraska's Family Farmers" has been used by the local government as an emotive political campaign. Colorado, similarly to Nebraska, has an economy largely reliant on agriculture, with the state's 34,000 farmers and ranchers contributing more than \$47 billion annually to the state's economy.<sup>43</sup> The idea behind "Meat Out Day" in Colorado came from Polis' Democratic party, the Republicans in Colorado therefore acted with similar uproar as those in Nebraska. Whilst the governor's office preached the envisioned 'benefits of a healthful, plant-based diet', the Colorado's Cattlemen Association and rancher community followed Nebraska in their retaliation with a "Meat In" arguing "MeatOut Day" was a 'slap in the face'.<sup>44</sup>

Nebraska has reminders of its "Beef State" status wherever you go. Their agriculture and cattle farming are a 'part of [their] identity'.<sup>45</sup> However, despite efforts from the government, this identity is being challenged by the rise of fake meat and plant-based alternatives. In Nebraska, 'plant-based alternatives to beef have gained foothold...in the form of the humble pea' which has seen a production increase in Nebraska of 81% since 2019.<sup>46</sup> This increase in growth is entirely driven by the requirement for pea protein in meat alternatives. One such Nebraskan farmer, Eric Thalken, sends all his peas to Puris which produces pea

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<sup>41</sup> "Nebraska Takes Aim at Colorado's Meat-free Day by Declaring Pro-Meat Day."; "Let's Stand Up for Nebraska's Family Farmers."

<sup>42</sup> "Nebraska Takes Aim at Colorado's Meat-free Day by Declaring Pro-Meat Day."

<sup>43</sup> Greg Henderson, "Colorado's MeatOut Day Promotes a Big Lie," *Drovers*, March 4, 2021, <https://www.drovers.com/opinion/colorados-meatout-day-promotes-big-lie>.

<sup>44</sup> Henderson, "Colorado's MeatOut Day Promotes a Big Lie."

<sup>45</sup> Richard Hall, "Long Prized for its Cattle, Nebraska is Joining the Plant-Based Meat Boom," *Independent*, December 9, 2021, <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/americas/nebraska-fake-meat-beef-climate-b1969549.html>.

<sup>46</sup> Hall, "Long Prized for its Cattle."

protein for companies such as Beyond Meat.<sup>47</sup> Thalken recognises the importance of both the fake meat market and cattle farming and states that he is 'going to grab both of these markets'.<sup>48</sup> However, this movement towards beef alternatives has been met with a negative response from other cattle farmers and ranchers, arguing companies such as Beyond Meat are violating the 'heart and soul of Nebraska' and their main source of income.<sup>49</sup> This expansion of the alternative meat market has 'raised eyebrows' in the "Beef State".<sup>50</sup> In an attempt to protect their valuable meat industry, Nebraskan lawmakers, have sought to 'curtail' plant-based imitators in the state government and in congress.<sup>51</sup> Republican Nebraskan Senator Deb Fischer- a member of the Senate Agriculture Committee has accused companies such as Beyond Meat of 'trying to piggyback on really, really good nutritious, safe beef'.<sup>52</sup> Additionally, 'Nebraskan lawmakers want to ban the word "meat" from vegetarian substitutes', further preventing plant-based alternatives from flourishing.<sup>53</sup> The bill would censor food labels and violations could result in up to a year in jail and a \$1,000 fine.<sup>54</sup> The extent of Government opposition towards plant-based alternatives is significant in influencing the consumption of cattle in Nebraska. It is evident however; these meat alternatives are taking hold.

A rise in plant-based alternatives in Nebraska can be seen in the growth of new vegan restaurants such as Modern Love in Omaha, Nebraska, which opened in 2016. Modern Love has ridiculed and challenged the government's "Meat on the Menu Day" campaign by launching on their Facebook, a retaliation campaign: 'Vegan Meat on the Menu'.<sup>55</sup> Modern Love asked for support for veganism,

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<sup>47</sup> Hall, "Long Prized for its Cattle."

<sup>48</sup> Hall, "Long Prized for its Cattle."

<sup>49</sup> "Nebraska Takes Aim at Colorado's Meat-free Day by Declaring Pro-Meat Day."

<sup>50</sup> Hall, "Long Prized for its Cattle."

<sup>51</sup> Hall, "Long Prized for its Cattle."

<sup>52</sup> Hall, "Long Prized for its Cattle."

<sup>53</sup> Dan Nosowitz, "Nebraska Lawmakers Want to Ban the Word "Meat" from Vegetarian Substitutes," *Modern Farmer*, January 18, 2019, <https://modernfarmer.com/2019/01/nebraska-lawmakers-want-to-ban-the-word-meat-from-vegetarian-substitutes/>.

<sup>54</sup> Nosowitz, "Nebraska Lawmakers Want to Ban the Word "Meat" from Vegetarian Substitutes."

<sup>55</sup> Modern Love, "Vegan Meat on the Menu," Facebook, March 19, 2021, <https://www.facebook.com/ModernLoveOmaha/photos/2641258722665419>.

claiming the governors call for the meat day was 'silly'.<sup>56</sup> Modern Love's "Vegan Meat on the Menu Day" launch post argued that 'taxpayers spend billions of dollars to subsidize meat and dairy while many vegetable farms depend on volunteers'.<sup>57</sup> By launching this campaign, Modern Love highlights the inequality between plant based producers and the dominating meat industry in Nebraska. James Walmsley, co-owner of Modern Love, therefore disputes that despite Ricketts' call for an end to environmental lobbyists, anyone supportive of "Vegan Meat on the Menu" would still be supporting local farmers and thus the Nebraskan agriculture industry. For example, local farmer Gavin Johnston says that 'working with Modern Love has helped his business a lot' and had introduced variation to his food production.<sup>58</sup>

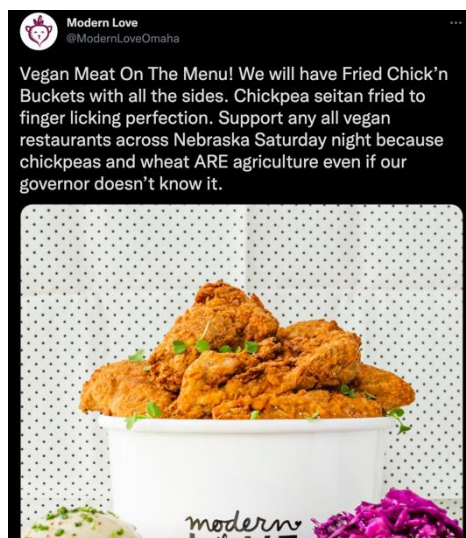


Figure 5. "Vegan Meat On The Menu" Tweet by Modern Love, March 20, 2021. From @ModernLoveOmaha, <https://twitter.com/ModernLoveOmaha/status/1373075875768508421>.

This provides evidence that there is room for a plant-based market in the "Beef State". There is no indication to suggest that encouraging meat alternatives would diminish Nebraska's agricultural system or their economy. Additionally, registered dietitian, Nichole Heppner argues that 'a plant-based diet is not harmful at all' and should be encouraged despite Ricketts' campaigns.<sup>59</sup> Heppner supports Modern Love's argument as stated in Figure 5, that 'chickpeas and wheat ARE agriculture even if our governor doesn't know it'.<sup>60</sup> She highlights that many Nebraskan farmers cultivate soy and wheat so plant-based dieters would in fact be supporting agriculture as Ricketts requested in

his anti-plant-based campaigns. Modern Love's label as one of 'the Best Vegan

<sup>56</sup> Modern Love, "Vegan Meat on the Menu."

<sup>57</sup> Modern Love, "Vegan Meat on the Menu."

<sup>58</sup> Lauren Melendez, "Pushback over Gov. Ricketts' 'Meat On The Menu' day," *6 News On Your Side*, March 20, 2021, <https://www.wowt.com/2021/03/20/pushback-over-gov-ricketts-meat-on-the-menu-day/>.

<sup>59</sup> Melendez, "Pushback over Gov. Ricketts' 'Meat On The Menu' day."

<sup>60</sup> Modern Love (@ModernLoveOmaha), "Vegan Meat on the Menu Day," Twitter, March 20, 2021, <https://twitter.com/ModernLoveOmaha/status/1373075875768508421>.

Restaurants in the Country' as deemed by Food Network, highlights the popularity of the meat alternative market, whether Ricketts likes it or not.<sup>61</sup> The aim of Modern Love is not telling people what or how to eat or even campaigning for a change towards plant-based diets, but to offer people options and act as a place 'where someone's values can match their diet'.<sup>62</sup> Their aim is not to take away from Nebraska's cattle farming industry, merely providing alternatives in such a meat-based state. The Modern Love vegan campaign against the local government's stance highlights the extent to which meat consumption and Nebraskan cattle farming has turned political.

Overall, it is evident that Nebraskan local government's obsession for people picking 'quinoa instead of cow' has led them to completely disregard the value of meat alternatives flourishing in Nebraska.<sup>63</sup> However, this has not stopped environmentalists and companies such as Modern Love from thriving. Their focus on Nebraska maintaining the status of the "Beef State" of the United States and maintaining their cattle-based economy has blinded the local government from acknowledging other agricultural production such as corn, wheat, and pea protein. In reality, if the local government were encouraging and progressive regarding plant-based diets they would still be supporting Nebraska's agriculture. Ricketts' motivations behind maintaining the "Beef State" status are blinkered, given that he overlooks the economic benefit of embracing 'the plant-based meat boom'.<sup>64</sup> The alternative meat market is expected to 'grow nationwide from \$12.1bn in 2019 to \$27.9bn by 2025'.<sup>65</sup> It must therefore be concluded that Ricketts' and his local governments' motivations are strongly political and inspired from their Republican beliefs.

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<sup>61</sup> Modern Love, "Vegan Meat on the Menu."

<sup>62</sup> Melendez, "Pushback over Gov. Ricketts' 'Meat On The Menu' day."

<sup>63</sup> Israel, "Nebraska governor bribes people to eat more meat."

<sup>64</sup> Hall, "Long Prized for its Cattle."

<sup>65</sup> Hall, "Long Prized for its Cattle."

## Chapter 2: "Here's the Beef"<sup>1</sup>

The local government's pro-meat stance and their motivations behind the push for the beef industry has been interrogated by mainstream media and farming organisations. Unlike the local government, mainstream media has not neglected the link between cattle and climate change. The media has frequently highlighted that excessive meat production in Nebraska has impacted climate change, and that action needs to be taken. Nebraskan mainstream media covers both the outraged pro meat supporter's response to increasing environmental concerns about their precious industry, as well as the rising support for fake meat and environmental activists. Nebraska Farmer blog editor, Curt Arens articulates this well: 'the fight for national food security and agriculture policy in the coming decades will not be fought on the farm...Those fights will take place in the media...Mainstream newscasts have power. What happens...on... network newscasts matter in our fields and on our farms'.<sup>2</sup> Furthermore, farming associations and large beef organisation websites such as the Nebraskan Cattlemen, whilst still promoting Nebraskan beef have acknowledged that something needs to be done in terms of the impact the industry is having on the environment. The environmental consequences of climate change such as changes to soil, water, and weather, are all factors that influence meat production- farming organisations are therefore more willing to accept environmental concerns as it directly impacts the practicalities of their work and livelihoods. Taking a different angle, Omaha's World-Herald News, in their report "The State of Beef: Much-Maligned Cattle Now Have Chance to be Part of Climate Solution".<sup>3</sup> offers some hope by considering new ways that the cattle industry can reduce its own 'environmental hoofprint'.<sup>4</sup> As previously discussed, Pete Ricketts, is more

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<sup>1</sup> Eleanor Cummins, "America's Obsession With Meat, Explained: Here's The Beef," *Popular Science*, October 28, 2019, <https://www.popsoci.com/why-americans-eat-so-much-meat/>.

<sup>2</sup> Curt Arens, "What Does Mainstream Media think about Farmers?" *Nebraska Farmer*, February 12, 2013, <https://www.farmprogress.com/blogs-does-mainstream-media-think-farmers-5083>.

<sup>3</sup> Henry Cordes, "The State of Beef: Much-maligned Cattle Now Have Chance to be Part of Climate Solution," *Omaha World-Herald*, last modified January 5, 2022, [https://omaha.com/news/local/the-state-of-beef-much-maligned-cattle-now-have-chance-to-be-part-of-climate/article\\_902d8338-3275-11ec-8200-5f1c72978934.html](https://omaha.com/news/local/the-state-of-beef-much-maligned-cattle-now-have-chance-to-be-part-of-climate/article_902d8338-3275-11ec-8200-5f1c72978934.html).

<sup>4</sup> Cordes, "The State of Beef: Much-maligned Cattle."



interested in political campaigning and votes, and has recognised he can get this support through encouraging a traditional all-American way of life. As political science professor John Hibbing argues, 'it's not just a question of what you eat but it becomes a question of what is it to be an American and what is it to challenge what it is to be an American'.<sup>5</sup> Ricketts has implemented American tradition through his "Meat on the Menu Day" campaign hoping to prevent an environmental revolution against beef's supremacy. This chapter hopes to evaluate the way that mainstream media and major beef websites are offering a wider, more informative perspective of the "Beef Battle", than the local government.<sup>6</sup>

The Nebraskan "Beef Battle" has been recognised as an example of a more national issue, resulting in national news channels having a lot to say about the matter. The political stance of mainstream media channels is significant in their opinions on cattle vs climate. More Republican leaning news channels have been seen to interrogate environmentalists and pro plant-based supporters. Ellen DeGeneres' plea on Instagram for people to 'be neat...eat less meat' sparked a movement against the growing environmental agenda.<sup>7</sup> FOX News, a national, Republican leaning news channel reports on this, debunking the idea that America's beef producers are 'villains' and argues that 'anti-meat crusaders...think they wear a crown of moral authority'.<sup>8</sup> FOX News evaluates the anti-meat activists' 'faulty logic', when considering the health advantages of beef vs plant-based alternatives.<sup>9</sup> Contrastingly, the LA Progressive Newsletter, a left leaning news channel, in their article "MeatOut Day in Colorado Starts a Meat War", highlights the significant push back against the meat industry and the politicians who support it.<sup>10</sup> The article slanders Rickett's pro-meat stance suggesting he may

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<sup>5</sup> Steve White, "Beef about Beef: Battle Highlights Meat's Importance in Politics," *NTV News*, April 1, 2021, <https://nebraska.tv/news/ntvs-grow/beef-about-beef-battle-highlights-meats-importance-in-politics>.

<sup>6</sup> Kipper, "Beef Battle."

<sup>7</sup> Deb Fischer, "America's Beef Producers Are Not Villains- Here's What Anti-Meat Advocates Just Don't Get," *Fox News*, November 1, 2019, <https://www.foxnews.com/opinion/americas-beef-producers-anti-meat-advocates-sen-deb-fisher>.

<sup>8</sup> Fischer, "America's Beef Producers Are Not Villains."

<sup>9</sup> Fischer, "America's Beef Producers Are Not Villains."

<sup>10</sup> Reynard Loki, "MeatOut Day In Colorado Starts a Meat War," *LA Progressive Newsletter*, March 30, 2021, <https://www.laprogressive.com/climate-change-2/meatout-day-meat-war>.

want to 'take a deeper look at what eating meat is doing to the planet' and pointing out the lack of acknowledgement the local government has towards the links between cattle and climate.<sup>11</sup> Journalist and environmental activist, Reynard Loki, belittles Rickett's governing skills, arguing that 'if we evolve past barbarism towards animals, it will be without the help of Gov Pete Ricketts, whose meat-loving way of life is really a way of death- for people, animals and the planet'.<sup>12</sup> Stephanie Feldstein, a supporter of "MeatOut Day" and sustainability director at the Center for Biological Diversity states, in the same article, that 'moving the American appetite from our burger heavy diet to plant-based eating is a powerful and necessary part of curbing the climate crisis...We can't ignore that public health, sustainability, climate resilience and food security are all part of the same recipe'.<sup>13</sup> Whilst the article still acknowledges that the meat industry is crucial to Nebraska, it further highlights that there is a growing shift towards veganism driven by young people and that this should be recognised by the local government. In reality however, Nebraska's local government have ignored this fact by not even permitting one day for the promotion of plant-based diets to allow 'an opening for some to consider the role that meat plays in their diet'.<sup>14</sup> National news channels commenting on the Nebraskan "Beef Battle" highlights its symbolism of a wider American climate vs cattle issue. Other more neutral mainstream media channels have reported on both sides of the cattle vs climate argument. News channel, 3 News Now has reported on the "Beef Battle" acknowledging both governmental points of view including recently retired Republican Congressmen Jeff's Fortenberry's support for the #NoFakeMeat campaign as well as plant-based meat enthusiasts such as co-owner of Modern Love, James Walmsley.<sup>15</sup> Fortenberry's push for #NoFakeMeat was in retaliation to Bill Gate's suggestion that in an effort to reduce climate change, 'all rich

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<sup>11</sup> Loki, "MeatOut Day."

<sup>12</sup> Loki, "MeatOut Day."

<sup>13</sup> Loki, "MeatOut Day."

<sup>14</sup> Loki, "MeatOut Day."

<sup>15</sup> Kipper, "Beef Battle."





Figure 6. "Would you give up meat for environmental reasons" Poll Tweet by KMTV 3 News Now, March 08, 2021. From @3NewsNowOmaha Twitter, <https://twitter.com/3NewsNowOmaha>.

countries should move to 100% synthetic beef'.<sup>16</sup> Contrastingly, the article also covers Walmsley's argument that "Meat on the Menu Day" is evidence that Ricketts feels threatened by the ever-growing plant-based industry in Nebraska which Walmsley deems as a sign that 'veganism is working'.<sup>17</sup> 3 News Now as a seemingly neutral news channel put a poll on their Twitter (Figure 6) asking the people of Nebraska: 'Would you give up meat for environmental reasons?' in which 59.1% said no, 23.2% said yes and 17.7% said maybe sometimes...<sup>18</sup> This demonstrates that there is likely still some way to go to get the American public to recognise the impact that cattle farming has on the environment. However, certain cities in Nebraska won't take as much convincing.

Omaha, the largest city in Nebraska and one of the most Democratic cities in the "Beef State", as shown by Figure 7- a map of the US showing the 2020 election results- is surrounded by a sea of Republican red cities highlighting the political contrast of the blue Democratic Omaha to other Republican Nebraskan cities. Omaha is home to several vegan and plant-based restaurants and cafes in

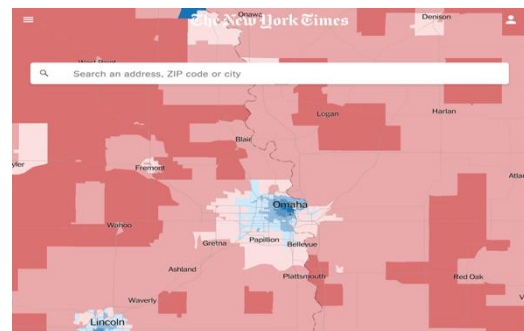


Figure 7. Political map of Nebraska, focused on Omaha, 2020, by Alice Park, Charlie Smart, Rumsey Taylor and Miles Watkins. From The New York Times, <https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2021/upshot/2020-election-map.html>.

<sup>16</sup> Stephen McBride, "Bill Gates Wants Rich Countries To Move To 100% Synthetic Beef, But Here's The Opportunity Behind This Trend," *Forbes*, March 22, 2021, <https://www.forbes.com/sites/stephenmcbride1/2021/03/22/bill-gates-wants-rich-countries-to-move-to-100-synthetic-beef-but-heres-the-opportunity-behind-this-trend/?sh=6ba1dd168995>.

<sup>17</sup> Kipper, "Beef Battle."

<sup>18</sup> KMTV 3 News Now (@3NewsNowOmaha), "Gov. Ricketts has established March 20 as Meat on the Menu Day," Twitter, March 08, 2021, [https://twitter.com/3NewsNowOmaha/status/1369054590826594316?ref\\_src=twsrc%5Etfw%7Ctwcamp%5Etweetembed%7Ctwtterm%5E1369054590826594316%7Ctwgr%5E%7Ctwcon%5Es1\\_&ref\\_url=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.3newsnow.com%2Fnews%2Flocal-news%2Fbeef-battle-as-bill-gates-urges-the-us-to-move-away-from-beef-nebraska-politicians-urge-residents-to-eat-it](https://twitter.com/3NewsNowOmaha/status/1369054590826594316?ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw%7Ctwcamp%5Etweetembed%7Ctwtterm%5E1369054590826594316%7Ctwgr%5E%7Ctwcon%5Es1_&ref_url=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.3newsnow.com%2Fnews%2Flocal-news%2Fbeef-battle-as-bill-gates-urges-the-us-to-move-away-from-beef-nebraska-politicians-urge-residents-to-eat-it).

comparison to other Nebraskan cities. As previously stated, there is an undeniable link between politics and cattle production and the recognition of the impact of meat on climate change as Republicans tend to ignore the damage of the beef production in order to protect their traditional all-American meat industry. The Omaha World-Herald local newspaper, reporting from one of the most Democratic Nebraskan cities, is not opposed to acknowledging the inextricable link between cattle and climate, taking a balanced view of the “Beef Battle” issues. Unlike the local government, Omaha’s local news acknowledges the importance in promoting what can be done to help both the beef industry and climate in Nebraska. Omaha World-Herald newspaper and their more balanced view has been recognised for ‘great reporting on.... changing climate and how it affects [their]...cattle industry in Nebraska and how this same industry can be part of the climate solution’.<sup>19</sup> One such recent report highlights how ‘ranchers now understand the need to take action and are ready to be a part of the solution. Sixty percent of rural Nebraskans recognise that action must be taken to stop the worst of climate change’.<sup>20</sup> Farmers and ranchers have recognised that it is in their best interest to consider the environmental damage of the cattle industry as climate change is having a knock-on effect on farming conditions. However, the battle remains; given the previous twitter opinion poll, there is one thing recognising the need for change and another thing putting it into action. Ricketts’ campaigns are surely working against this by promoting ongoing levels of meat consumption in the state. The Omaha World Herald goes on to report on a lecture at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln where it was discussed that the ‘belief that the climate impact of cattle has often been exaggerated...But participants also stressed the importance for the beef industry to reduce its emissions of methane, a potent greenhouse gas that warms the climate 28 time more than carbon dioxide’.<sup>21</sup> Overall, the acknowledgement in mainstream media and local organisations on the impact of the beef industry is far more considerable than the local government’s stance on the issue. Highlighting the ongoing battle, Omaha News reports that ‘we’ve got to do

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<sup>19</sup> Madelaine Alder, “The Public Pulse: Nebraska Cattle and Climate Change,” *Omaha World-Herald* November 3, 2021, [https://omaha.com/opinion/letters/the-public-pulse-nebraska-cattle-and-climate-change-kids-vaccination-medicare-help/article\\_2b0cc404-3b2c-11ec-b173-3f517b43afb2.html](https://omaha.com/opinion/letters/the-public-pulse-nebraska-cattle-and-climate-change-kids-vaccination-medicare-help/article_2b0cc404-3b2c-11ec-b173-3f517b43afb2.html).

<sup>20</sup> Alder, “The Public Pulse.”

<sup>21</sup> Alder, “The Public Pulse.”

something different... It's just not sustainable what we're doing now at all'.<sup>22</sup> Meanwhile, Ricketts hands out Beef Passports to encourage people to consume even more meat.

NTV News covers meat's importance in politics and the growing "Beef about Beef".<sup>23</sup> The article highlights the interrogation of pro-meat eaters by groups such as the People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals organisation (PETA), who have repeatedly mocked 'meathead', Pete Ricketts.<sup>24</sup> In a statement to NTV, PETA said they were 'calling out a governor who is so afraid of the vegan future that he created a whole day to celebrate his meat-industry campaign, contributors for killing animals, operating filthy slaughterhouses...and turning a blind eye to meat-related maladies such as heart attacks and diabetes'.<sup>25</sup> This article backs up James Walmsley's views that Ricketts is threatened by the growing veganism in Nebraska. His extreme "MeatIn" retaliation to Colorado's "MeatOut Day" suggests his fear of the support the campaign may get. Additionally, groups in the media such as the

Nebraska Physicians have further attacked Ricketts' pro-meat angle. The group have asked Ricketts to ditch his anti-plant-based campaign and instead asks that, 'for the benefit of all Nebraskans, including Nebraskan farmers, and businesses,



Figure 8. "Beef about Beef: Battle Highlights Meat's Importance in Politics," by Steve White, April 1, 2021. From NTV News, <https://nebraska.tv/news/ntvs-grow/beef-about-beef-battle-highlights-meats-importance-in-politics>.



Figure 9. "Nebraska Physicians Ask Gov. Ricketts to Ditch Pro-Meat Event and Switch to "Promote Plant Protein Day", March 19, 2021. From Physicians Committee, <https://www.pcrm.org/news/news-releases/nebraska-physicians-ask-gov-ricketts-ditch-pro-meat-event-and-switch-promote>.

<sup>22</sup> Paul Hammel and Henry Cordes, "The State of Beef: Cattle Producers, Nebraska Politicians Seek Solutions to Low Profits," *Omaha World-Herald*, October 12, 2021, [https://omaha.com/news/local/the-state-of-beef-cattle-producers-nebraska-politicians-seek-solutions-to-low-profits/article\\_7075e100-2d04-11ec-a2fa-1fdd14c4a060.html#tracking-source=article-related-bottom](https://omaha.com/news/local/the-state-of-beef-cattle-producers-nebraska-politicians-seek-solutions-to-low-profits/article_7075e100-2d04-11ec-a2fa-1fdd14c4a060.html#tracking-source=article-related-bottom).

<sup>23</sup> White, "Beef about Beef."

<sup>24</sup> White, "Beef about Beef."

<sup>25</sup> White, "Beef about Beef."

the state should celebrate Nebraska crops and focus on a transition to cleaner, safer food production'.<sup>26</sup> This message resonates with large Nebraskan meat organisations whose incentives are largely to protect the livelihoods and businesses of Nebraskan farmers and who have acknowledged sustainability may be the way to do this.

Whilst recognising and supporting the huge financial rewards of the meat industry, Nebraskan local government have somewhat hijacked the issues around meat farming for their own political gain, by using this emotive subject to popularise themselves with the all-American Republican, thus gaining voter support. Major farming organisations, however, are passionate about a more sustainable future for beef production in Nebraska and other such states, in order to protect decades of family farming businesses and maintain their agricultural dependent income. The National Cattlemen's Beef Association is a large marketing organisation for America's one million cattle farmers and ranchers with a vision to be the trusted leader and definitive choice of the US cattle and beef industry.<sup>27</sup> The Nebraskan Cattlemen provide more local leadership and representation for Nebraskan beef producers helping beef go from 'pasture to plate'.<sup>28</sup> The Nebraska Cattlemen 'serves as the spokesman for the state's beef cattle industry and represents professional cattle breeders, ranchers and feeders, as well as 47 county and local cattlemen's associations', their voice is therefore considerable and influential when it comes to the production and consumption of beef in Nebraska.<sup>29</sup> In a testimony addressing the 2007 Farm Bill, Nebraskan cattle farmer and board member of the National Cattlemen's Beef Association, Jay Wolf, stated that 'Nebraskan Cattlemen view agriculture policy with fundamental principles that reflect the independent nature of cattlemen of wanting the opportunity to run [their] operations as [they]

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<sup>26</sup> "Nebraska Physicians Ask Gov. Ricketts to Ditch Pro-Meat Event and Switch to "Promote Plant Protein Day"," PhysiciansCommittee for Responsible Medicine, March 19, 2021, <https://www.pcrm.org/news/news-releases/nebraska-physicians-ask-gov-ricketts-ditch-pro-meat-event-and-switch-promote>.

<sup>27</sup> "About: National Cattlemen's Beef Association," National Cattlemen's Beef Association, accessed January 24, 2022, <https://www.ncba.org/about>.

<sup>28</sup> "Nebraska Cattlemen: Working For Nebraska Beef Producers," Nebraska Cattlemen, accessed March 16, 2022, <https://nebraskacattlemen.org/>.

<sup>29</sup> United States Congress House: Committee on Agriculture, *Review of Federal Farm Policy*, (US Government Printing Office, 2006), 402.

see fit within minimal intrusion from the government', arguing in favour of generational farmers livelihoods instead of the desire to maintain the profitable estimated \$11.5 billion all-American meat industry.<sup>30</sup> The Nebraskan Cattlemen have made it clear that 'economic, social and environmental sustainability are all key if (they) want to pass on thriving operations to the next generation of Nebraskan farmers and ranchers', highlighting that it is in the best interest of farming organisations to take a more balanced approach.<sup>31</sup> Furthermore, the National Cattlemen's Beef Association publicised that their goal was 'to be climate neutral by 2040'.<sup>32</sup> There is growing recognition that sustainability will in the long term help Nebraskan cattle farming continue to flourish. The organisation: "Beef It's What's For Dinner", part of the National Cattlemen's Beef Association, claims to 'implement numerous proven sustainability practices', throughout their beef production, stating that 'beef farmers and ranchers are dedicated to producing beef in a way that priorities the planet, people, animals and progress'.<sup>33</sup> Whilst they are still a significant beef producer in Nebraska and contributing to the promotion of beef, their response to the environmental damages their industry has on the planet, is significantly more present compared to the Nebraskan local government. Their influence on the consumption of beef is consequently less damaging than that of the local governments. The beef industry, to large organisations such as these, represents 'community...resilience', including 'social sustainability...worker safety, animal welfare, antibiotic and technology use and the culture and traditions of beef producers'.<sup>34</sup> Whilst they are still encouraging meat consumption in Nebraska, the beef industry for large organisations is focused on the well-being of farmers and consumers and the importance of addressing the contribution beef makes to climate change. "Beef. It's What's For Dinner" recognises that 'continuing to build on the beef industry's strong

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<sup>30</sup> United States Congress House, *Review of Federal Farm Policy*, 402.

<sup>31</sup> Nebraska Cattlemen (@nebraskacattlemen), "Would you rather drive past rolling grasslands or suburban parking lots?" Instagram photo, February 10, 2022, <https://www.instagram.com/p/CZzKPAvL-lk/>.

<sup>32</sup> Alder, "The Public Pulse."

<sup>33</sup> "Beef Sustainability: Environmental, Social and Economic Impact," Beef. It's What's For Dinner, accessed January 24, 2022, <https://www.beefitswhatsfordinner.com/raising-beef/beef-sustainability/>.

<sup>34</sup> "Beef Sustainability."

sustainability progress is critical to ensuring beef's rightful place in a sustainable American diet'.<sup>35</sup> The sustainability of beef is just as important as the tradition of beef in Nebraska, in their eyes, and is significant in keeping the industry successful.

Overall, mainstream media platforms and large farming organisation websites call into question the motives behind the push for meat consumption in Nebraska. It is clear that politics is incredibly influential in both the local government and mainstream news channels. It is dependent on the political stance of the news channels if they choose whether to neglect the climate issue surrounding the cattle industry or not. The local Nebraskan government are trying to appeal to a Republican demographic whilst the large farming organisations have their generational farming system in mind. Farming organisation websites provide a realistic view of the link between cattle and climate as it is their own livelihoods that are being affected. Beef organisations aren't going to stop producing meat and start selling plant-based alternatives, they aren't going to open vegan restaurants, but they are taking some responsibility and recognising the importance of sustainable cattle farming because they want the beef industry to continue to thrive. Climate change will threaten farming conditions and beef production, so it is in their best interest to help combat this, whether that is supporting the reduction of meat consumption or alternative methods. This is leaps and bounds ahead of the local government whose main concern is their political campaign which revolves largely around appealing to the All-American Republican through the use of American culture, including food culture. The next chapter will evaluate a less centrally organised perspective of meat consumption in Nebraska, looking at how social media has interrogated the "Beef Battle". These findings may be a more accurate and localised depiction of what people really think about reducing their beef consumption and the associations that come with it such as veganism becoming 'mainstream', despite all local government's efforts.<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>35</sup> "Beef Sustainability."

<sup>36</sup> Emily Krempholtz, "Veganism Has Gone Mainstream, But It's Not Just About The Animals Anymore," *Sentient Media*, April 28, 2021, <https://www.theguardian.com/lifeandstyle/2021/oct/10/from-fringe-to-mainstream-how-millions-got-a-taste-for-going-vegan>.



### Chapter 3: "Herd it Here" First<sup>1</sup>

In recent years, social media has become a huge advertising platform for businesses. Instagram, Facebook, Podcasts, YouTube and Twitter have all contributed to a new form of spreading the word and can be an influential way, specifically on young people, of campaigning new trends, politics and ideas. In recent years, social media has enhanced the growth and popularity of veganism and vegetarianism, '#vegan has had more than 61 million posts listed on Instagram', and according to Google, 'in 2008, veganism had a popularity rating of just 17 out of 100 – 10 years later this has increased to 88'.<sup>2</sup> As shown in Figures 10-13, this increase has been widely reported in mainstream news, on a national scale. Veganism and vegetarianism have become a Gen Z and snowflake generation "trend". The use of social media in influencing meat consumption is therefore significant.

Despite government efforts to maintain an all-American culture through the use of diet, 'more than 35 million Americans have explored a plant-based diet and reduced their consumption of meat...young people are

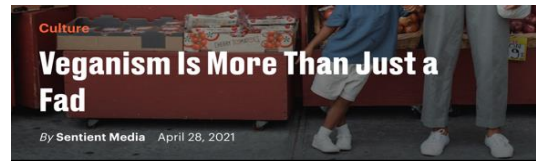


Figure 10. "Veganism Is More Than Just A Fad," by Sentient Media, April 28, 2021. From Sentient Media, <https://sentientmedia.org/increase-in-veganism/>.

#### Veganism: Why are vegan diets on the rise?

By Lora Jones  
Business Reporter, BBC News  
© 2 January 2020

Figure 11. "Veganism: Why are vegan diets on the rise?" by Lora Jones, January 2, 2020. From BBC News, <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/business-44488051>.

#### Veganism Has Gone Mainstream, But It's Not Just About The Animals Anymore

Figure 12. "Veganism Has Gone Mainstream, But It's Not Just About The Animals Anymore," by Emily Krempholtz. From Buzzworthy, <https://www.buzzworthy.com/whats-driving-the-vegan-trend/>.

#### The Observer From fringe to mainstream: how millions got a taste for going vegan

First, it was a fad. Now, as meat consumption falls, it's part of everyday life ... the unstoppable rise of the plant-based diet

Figure 13. "From Fringe to Mainstream," by Andrew Anthony, October 10, 2021. From *The Guardian*, <https://www.theguardian.com/lifeandstyle/2021/oct/10/from-fringe-to-mainstream-how-millions-got-a-taste-for-going-vegan>.

<sup>1</sup> *Herd It Here*, Nebraska Cattlemen, podcast, MP3 Audio.

<sup>2</sup> "Social Media and the Rise of the Vegan," *Sunderland*, June 28, 2018, <https://www.sunderland.ac.uk/more/news/story/social-media-and-the-rise-of-the-vegan-607#:~:text=Social%20media%20influencers%20are%20believed,has%20spiked%20in%20recent%20years.>

driving that shift'.<sup>3</sup> The drive from young people likely stems from the exposure that the trends of veganism and vegetarianism are getting on social media in recent years. Beef organisations have therefore retaliated by creating their own social media pages to promote the consumption of beef- starting a "Meat War".<sup>4</sup> Social media's audience is the younger generation, therefore 'younger Americans have shifted to veganism at nearly double the rate of older Americans'.<sup>5</sup> Their exposure to recent vegan trends on social media puts the cattle industry- reliant on passing it's business down to younger generations- at risk, forcing a rise in a pro-meat social media presence. According to research conducted in 2019 by YouGov, 'more than one in five young Americans say they would be willing to eliminate meat from their diet in order to reduce carbon emissions and combat climate change'.<sup>6</sup> This statistic highlights that the motivation for young people to eliminate meat from their diets is not solely because it's a 'trendy choice'.<sup>7</sup> Nebraska's social media is largely based on either encouraging meat consumption or encouraging sustainable farming to continue their generational cattle system. There is certainly an online presence for Nebraska's vegans, but it is drowned out by pro-meat eaters. This chapter will aim to look at the perspective of meat consumption in the "Beef State" from a local angle, through looking at different forms of Nebraskan social media, such as Instagram, Facebook and Spotify Podcasts.

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<sup>3</sup> Reynard Loki, "MeatOut Day In Colorado Starts a Meat War", LA Progressive Newsletter, accessed January 24, 2022, <https://www.laprogressive.com/climate-change-2/meatout-day-meat-war/>.

<sup>4</sup> Loki, "MeatOut Day."

<sup>5</sup> Nils-Gerrit Wunsch, "Consumers Who Are Vegan or Vegetarian in the US, 2018, by Age Group," Statista, January 27, 2022, <https://www.statista.com/statistics/738851/vegan-vegetarian-consumers-us/>.

<sup>6</sup> Jamie Ballard and Graeme Bruce, "One in Five Millennials has Changed their Diet to Reduce their Impact on the Planet," YouGov America, January 23, 2020, <https://today.yougov.com/topics/consumer/articles-reports/2020/01/23/millennials-diet-climate-change-environment-poll/>.

<sup>7</sup> Emily Krempholtz, "Veganism Has Gone Mainstream, But It's Not Just About The Animals Anymore," Buzzworthy, accessed April 27, 2022, <https://www.buzzworthy.com/whats-driving-the-vegan-trend/>.



The median age in Nebraska is approximately 36.2 years of age.<sup>8</sup> The largest and second largest percentage of people using Instagram in the USA in 2022 are the 25-34 age bracket (31.5%) followed by the 18-24 age bracket (30.1%).<sup>9</sup> 61.6% of all Instagram users are therefore below Nebraska's median age, meaning fewer people in the "Beef State" will be exposed to trending vegan and vegetarian posts on platforms such as Instagram. However, pro-meat organisations are still using Instagram as a form of advertising to promote the encouragement of beef consumption in an attempt to combat growing vegan trends in the younger generation. The Nebraska Beef Council Instagram page: @Nebraskabeef, which began in 2017 has 146 posts, only one of which has acknowledged the connection

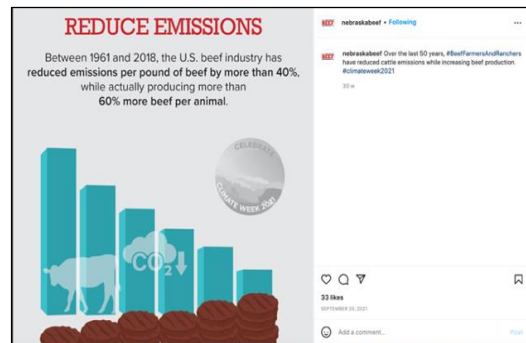


Figure 14. "Reduce Emissions" Instagram Post, September 20, 2021. From @Nebraskabeef Instagram, <https://www.instagram.com/p/CUDvM-ErP0V/>.



Figure 15. "Nebraska Beef Passport" Instagram Post, April 30, 2021. From @Nebraskabeef Instagram, <https://www.instagram.com/p/COTVbESqBv/>.

between Nebraskan beef cattle production, the environment and climate change. This one post, shown in Figure 14, highlights a reduction of carbon dioxide emissions per pound of beef since 1961 but makes no mention of the climate change impact and corresponding Nebraskan 'temperatures going...up'.<sup>10</sup> It is merely a post to justify their growing beef production rather than an effort

to take more sustainable action. The @Nebraskabeef Instagram page can be seen as an advertising tool, used to encourage meat consumption by publicising schemes such as the Beef Passport Programme as in Figure 15. Publicising this programme shows the Nebraska Beef Councils support for the local government's

<sup>8</sup> "Nebraska Population 2022," World Population Review, accessed April 27, 2022, <https://worldpopulationreview.com/states/nebraska-population>.

<sup>9</sup> "Instagram: distribution of global audiences 2022, by age group," Statista, March 22, 2022, <https://www.statista.com/statistics/325587/instagram-global-age-group/>.

<sup>10</sup> Ryan Evens, 'Climate Change and Future Nebraska Water Challenges with Dave Aiken,' November 2021, in *Nebraska Farm Cast*, Center for Agricultural Profitability: University of Nebraska-Lincoln, podcast, MP3 Audio, 0:54.

pro-meat initiatives. The Beef Passport initiative is a direct push back against growing Nebraskan environmentalists and “MeatOut Day”. The use of mouth-watering images to draw in meat-lovers, is an advertising technique showing powerful messages in an attempt to highlight their dominance and supremacy against the growing environmentalists in Nebraska.

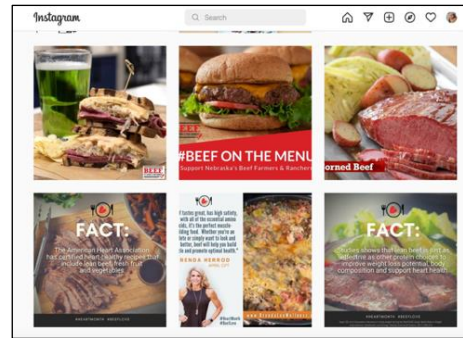


Figure 16. Instagram Feed, accessed April 25, 2022. From @Nebraskabeef Instagram, <https://www.instagram.com/nebraskabeef/>.

Vegan restaurant, Modern Love’s Instagram page: @Modernloveomaha, advertises its plant-based alternatives in the form of traditional meat-based burgers, wings and ribs. Their page is the epitome of health. Interestingly, there is no direct environmental activism to indoctrinate their audience with vegan ideas to their audience, just enthusiasm about plant-based food, suggesting that Modern Love are secure and confident in their ‘swanky vegan comfort food’.<sup>11</sup> As

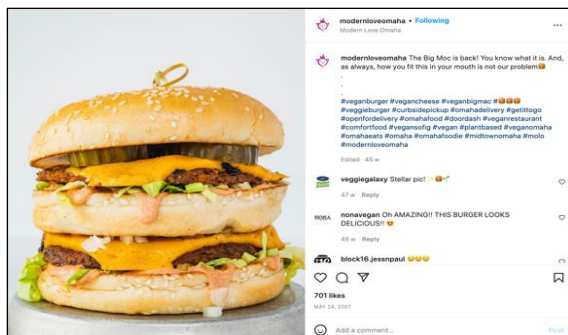


Figure 17. “The Big Moc is back!” Instagram Post, May 24, 2021. From @Modernloveomaha Instagram, <https://www.instagram.com/p/CPRR7NKnRi1/>.



Figure 18. “Beet Burger!” Instagram Post, October 8, 2021. From @Modernloveomaha, <https://www.instagram.com/p/CUV9cXWN37b/>.

in Figures 17 and 18, their Instagram page shows plant-based alternatives such as the “Big-Moc” Burger- a McDonald’s dupe- and “Beet Burgers”, demonstrating that there is a more environmentally friendly alternative to meaty comfort food.

<sup>11</sup> Modern Love Omaha (@Modernloveomaha), Instagram page, <https://www.instagram.com/p/CZxKPAvL-lk/>.

As previously discussed, the local government's aim to discourage any methods to help reduce meat consumption is impacting climate change. Ironically, this is resulting in changes in Nebraskan weather, soil, water, and temperatures, causing indirect damage to the Nebraskan cattle industry. In comparison to The Nebraska Beef Council, the Nebraskan

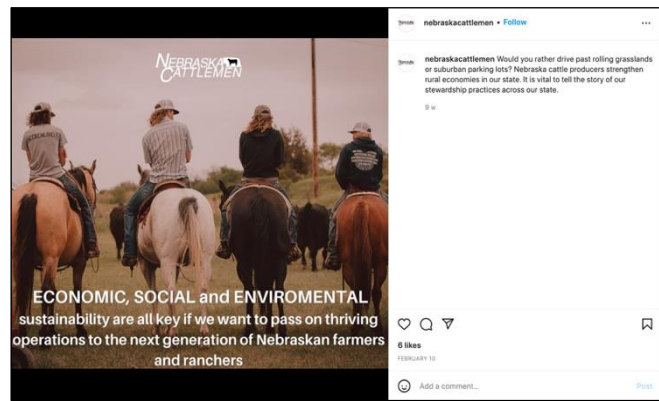


Figure 19. "Would you rather drive past rolling grasslands or suburban parking lots?" Instagram Post, February 10, 2022. From @Nebraskacattlemen, <https://www.instagram.com/p/CZzKPAvL-lk/>.

Cattlemen's Instagram page: @Nebraskancattlemen, has a more family friendly focus and acknowledges the importance of sustainable farming for generational cattle farmers. There is a clear emphasis on saving their cattle businesses and livelihoods rather than advertising and promoting vast meat consumption. The promotion of sustainability on the @Nebraskancattlemen Instagram such as in Figure 19 highlights the Nebraskan Cattlemen's awareness of the role that sustainability has in maintaining a thriving cattle industry. These previously discussed Instagram pages highlight the different motivations behind these relevant Nebraskan organisations and how they have used Instagram as a public awareness platform.

Another form of social media which has taken stronghold as a form of spreading anti "MeatOut Day" ideals, is Facebook. Further afield, the Western Justice is an organisation based in Colorado that engages in political action to preserve and protect American western heritage.<sup>12</sup> Their Facebook Group: The "Attack on Beef is an Attack on the West" has been used as a campaign tool in defending the western way of life against the environmental movement and Colorado's Governor Polis' "MeatOut Day". A post from 2021 suggests that the group wants to 'fight back' against the 'falsehoods about animal agriculture', arguing that the 'battle against beef is much larger than just beef – it is a battle against the entire cattle

<sup>12</sup> "Western Justice Info," Western Justice, accessed April 30, 2022, <https://www.westernjustice.info/#:~:text=Western%20Justice%20Legislative%20Fund%20is,and%20protect%20our%20western%20heritage.>

industry and ultimately, rural America'.<sup>13</sup> This reaction to Colorado local government's attempt to introduce just one day of reducing meat consumption seems extreme. The Facebook group claims that 'cow fart narrative and myths have dominated mainstream media'.<sup>14</sup> Whilst this may be true, the information is certainly not narratives. A study from the Department of Animal Science at the University of California by air quality specialist, Dr. Frank Mitloehner, has scientifically proven that: 'cows contribute to global warming through the production of methane, a greenhouse gas that leads to climate change. Cows emit methane as they digest their food, then pass gas'.<sup>15</sup> He goes on to highlight that 'methane...is...28 time more potent in warming the atmosphere' than carbon dioxide.<sup>16</sup> The claim that there has been a 'false narrative that has created unnecessary and misplaced guilt in consumers' minds', is unsupported.<sup>17</sup> Much like the Nebraskan Cattlemen, the page considers the importance of ensuring that they must 'preserve (their) land for future generations'.<sup>18</sup> However, there is no acknowledgement that environmental progress and sustainability is a way to ensure this. The page demonstrates anger towards the scientific facts, 'we cannot allow misinformation and long-perpetuated falsehoods to destroy one of our nation's most important industries'.<sup>19</sup> In reality, these "falsehoods" may help raise awareness and push forward a more sustainable route thus saving western American's beloved cattle industries.

Podcasts on Spotify or Apple Music have become a popular form of spreading the word and in Pete Ricketts' case, a useful campaigning tool. The Nebraska Way Podcast is hosted by Nebraskan governor, Pete Ricketts 'to give listeners the

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<sup>13</sup> Western Justice, "An Attack on Beef is an Attack on the West," Facebook page, <https://m.facebook.com/WesternJusticeLF/photos/a.161664062234059/286002063133591/?type=3>.

<sup>14</sup> Western Justice, "An Attack on Beef."

<sup>15</sup> "Cows: Why Are Cows Bad for The Environment and What Can You Do?" The Humane League, November 9, 2021, <https://thehumaneleague.org/article/why-are-cows-bad-for-the-environment>.

<sup>16</sup> "Why Are Cows Bad for The Environment."

<sup>17</sup> Western Justice, "An Attack on Beef."

<sup>18</sup> Western Justice, "An Attack on Beef."

<sup>19</sup> Western Justice, "An Attack on Beef."

opportunity to hear from people who are moving (their) state forward about the issues that matter most to Nebraskans'.<sup>20</sup> The podcast therefore provides an extremely Republican stance on issues such as meat consumption in Nebraska. The motivations behind the podcast are evidently political and for campaigning purposes, 'we are excited to launch the Nebraska Way Podcast, so more Nebraskans can connect to the work of the Governor's Office', implying the podcast will be used as a tool to infiltrate Rickett's pro-meat ideas to the people of Nebraska.<sup>21</sup> Through his pro-meat campaign preaching, Ricketts' podcast provides a platform for personal political gain but no financial or practical benefits for the cattle industry. In Episode 30 of the Nebraska Way podcast, President of the Nebraska Farm Bureau and 4<sup>th</sup> generation farmer, Mark Mchargue speaks with Ricketts to address his experience in farming and livestock production and the importance of Nebraskan agriculture, as well as the fight to maintain the industry's dominance. Both Mchargue and Ricketts agree on the importance of agriculture labelling it a 'really big deal in Nebraska'.<sup>22</sup> Throughout the podcast McHargue and Ricketts debate the environmentalist action towards the beef industry and queries their motivations: 'are you really about cleaning up the environment or is it about having an agenda?'<sup>23</sup> One could pose a similar question to Ricketts and ask him, is he really supporting the family farmers and generational cattle industry as they navigate the impact of climate change or is it about having a personal political agenda? Ricketts and McHargue provide little insight into the damage the beef industry is having on the environment by questioning the validity of methane's contribution to climate change. Instead, they preach about their low carbon footprint 'relative to other beef sectors', highlighting that their production of the 'highest quality beef in the world', is of more importance than environmental progress.<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> "About" *The Nebraska Way*, Pete Ricketts, podcast, MP3 Audio.

<sup>21</sup> "Gov. Ricketts Launches "The Nebraska Way" Podcast," Official Nebraska Government Website, June 26, 2019, <https://governor.nebraska.gov/press/gov-ricketts-launches-%E2%80%9C-nebraska-way%E2%80%9D-podcast>.

<sup>22</sup> Pete Ricketts, 'Episode 30- Mark McHargue,' in *The Nebraska Way*, Pete Ricketts, podcast, MP3 Audio, 11:15.

<sup>23</sup> Ricketts, 'Episode 30- Mark McHargue,' 51:08

<sup>24</sup> Ricketts, 'Episode 30- Mark McHargue,' 43:10 ; Ricketts, 'Episode 30- Mark McHargue,' 42:48.

In a contrasting perspective, Nebraska Farm Cast, a podcast produced by the Center for Agricultural Profitability in the Department of Agricultural Economics at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln, offers essential farm and ranch management information for agricultural decision makers.<sup>25</sup> Unlike the Nebraska Way podcast, this podcast has practical and economic motivations to encourage the Nebraskan cattle farming industry to flourish in a time of rising climate change. Two episodes with Dave Aiken- professor and water and agricultural law specialist- *The Glasgow Climate Conference: What Does It Mean for Nebraska Ag* and *Climate Change the Future Nebraska Water Challenges*, both offer insight into the detrimental effects of climate change on Nebraska cattle industry. This information is given by agricultural organisations in the interests of farmers and ranchers economic stability and livelihoods, offering them solutions to sustainable farming going forward. The local government's podcast offers no such insight into the importance of acting on climate change to save what they deem as the their 'number one industry'.<sup>26</sup> The local government claim that it is 'really important that ag [agriculture] does well- if ag does well the state directly does well'.<sup>27</sup> If the cattle industry was so important to them, and not just their Republican campaign, why would they not be as similarly concerned as the Nebraska Farm Cast on the impact of climate change? A rise in temperatures and more intense storms 'will be a bad game changer for Nebraska and Nebraska agriculture'.<sup>28</sup> As highlighted by Ryan Evens 'we're going to see some big changes in Nebraska as climate changes proceeds'.<sup>29</sup> Aiken goes on to state that 'currently the number of days over 100 degrees range from 2-5 days...increase by 2040 or so to 24-27 days per year in eastern Nebraska to 33-36 days per year in western Nebraska'.<sup>30</sup> This rise in temperature means that during these hotter parts of the year, it is expected that

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<sup>25</sup> Ryan Evans, in *Nebraska Farm Cast*, Center for Agricultural Profitability: University of Nebraska-Lincoln, podcast, MP3 Audio.

<sup>26</sup> Ricketts, 'Episode 30- Mark McHargue,' 10:43.

<sup>27</sup> Ricketts, 'Episode 30- Mark McHargue,' 11:41.

<sup>28</sup> Ryan Evans, 'The Glasgow Climate Conference: What Does It Mean for Nebraska Ag? With Dave Aiken,' December 2021, in *Nebraska Farm Cast*, Center for Agricultural Profitability: University of Nebraska-Lincoln, podcast, MP3 Audio, 13:04.

<sup>29</sup> Evans, 'Climate Change.' 0:43.

<sup>30</sup> Evans, 'Climate Change.' 1:16.



water use for irrigation will increase by '50% or more'.<sup>31</sup> How can the local government not want to mitigate these effects by supporting campaigns such as "MeatOut Day", a one day initiative? Whilst the Nebraska Farm Cast are not anti-cattle by any means, the podcast provides a far more local, realistic and balanced perspective of the cattle vs climate situation in Nebraska, addressing the threat of climate, not the threat of 'radical environmentalists'.<sup>32</sup> Herd it Here Podcast by the Nebraskan Cattlemen take a similar approach to Nebraska Farm Cast in their aim to 'find out how (they) can be environmentally proactive'.<sup>33</sup> Whilst these podcasts endorse beef consumption, in contrast to Nebraska Way, both offer acknowledgement, solutions and advice on the growing climate crisis in Nebraska, encouraging the importance of sustainable cattle-farming.

In an open house talk for individual opinions, at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln, using the platform Media Hub, farm wife Leah Beyer discusses "Beef and the Environment: Do People Really Care?" Using data and research from ELANCO, a global animal health research company, Beyer evaluates the impact of social media and its links to meat consumption. Her argument has a heavy pro-meat stance. Beyer recognises the meat and plant-based trends on social media and internet searches. She highlights, as shown in Figure 20 that "MeatIn" posts have had more mentions on social media than "MeatOut Day".<sup>34</sup> She uses this data to suggest that the ongoing "Beef Battle" in the United States, has been won by the beef

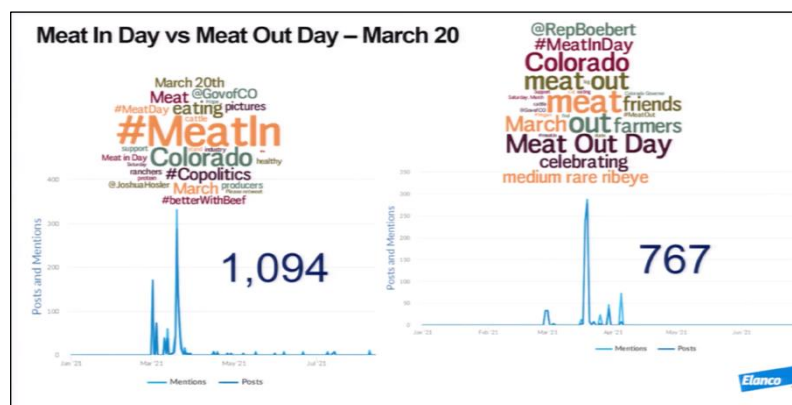


Figure 20. "Meat In Day vs Meat Out Day- March 20" Graph, by ELANCO, August 27, 2021. From University of Nebraska-Lincoln Media Hub, <https://mediahub.unl.edu/media/17758>.

<sup>31</sup> Evans, 'Climate Change.' 2:33.

<sup>32</sup> Ricketts, 'Episode 30- Mark McHargue,' 28:05.

<sup>33</sup> "Your Livestock Operation's Carbon Footprint: How It's Measured and Why It Matters: Episode Description" in *Herd It Here*, Nebraska Cattlemen, podcast, MP3 Audio.

<sup>34</sup> Leah Beyer, "Beef and Environment: Do People Really Care?" *University of Nebraska-Lincoln Media Hub*, August 27, 2021, <https://mediahub.unl.edu/media/17758>.

eating, all-American traditional way of life. She goes on to propose that people aren't 'thinking about the environment', they just want the status of being a vegan.<sup>35</sup> She sees veganism as 'really trendy', but concludes that beef-eating is still the preferred and dominant food culture in the United States.<sup>36</sup> There is little acknowledgement or understanding of the impact of climate change and the need for sustainability. So, despite large organisations' stance on sustainability and efforts to encourage it, there is still some work to be done to persuade individual cattle farming families under the ruse of the local government.

Social media, depending on the target audience, Instagram for the younger generation and Facebook for the older, can be an incredibly effective and influential advertising platform for different organisations with opposing viewpoints. Clever use of Instagram and Facebook posts, amongst other forms of social media, can consciously and subliminally impact the readers thought process. I have highlighted this by showing some of the effective use of these platforms. The use of social media platforms for these purposes will no doubt carry on increasing, so both sides of the "Beef Battle" will need to continue to invent clever ways of influencing their intended audience. It is clear that opinions on Nebraska's "Beef State" status is not as black and white as the local government suggests. People are in fact open to reducing the impact the beef industry is having on the planet, even large beef organisations. By looking at more localised media platforms, there is obvious recognition that a sustainable farming future for Nebraska is sought after and deemed necessary if the livelihoods of farmers and Nebraskan's generational farming system are to be maintained. Looking at social media platforms makes it clear that the local government have only one interest at heart- their own political gains.

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<sup>35</sup> Beyer, "Beef and Environment."

<sup>36</sup> Beyer, "Beef and Environment."



### Conclusion- Here's The Beef:

It is evident that Nebraska's biggest obstacle to cattle and climate living in symbiosis with each other is the Nebraskan local government. There is evidently a large acknowledgement by both mainstream media platforms and social media that the environmental impact of the Nebraskan cattle industry must be considered if it is to be sustainable for future generations. Nebraska is a prime example of the exploitation of red meat for the purpose of political gains. The local government, with their political progress in mind, prevents and belittles any attempts to heighten environmental awareness in regard to the cattle industry. To them, meat is a vote. The resistance towards combating the climate crisis from the Nebraskan local government stems from political incentives as opposed to desire to sustain the cattle industry, their critical influence will likely therefore discourage movements towards more plant-based diets in Nebraska and will certainly prevent current vegan or environmentalist groups from taking stronghold.

To conclude, the politics and culture of beef in the United States of America is highly influential in the motivations behind its consumption. Is it likely the USA will remain a beef-heavy country, it is deep-rooted into their society and is a form of identity for many Americans. The political link to beef consumption is one such link that will tie red meat with Americans forever. The all-American, traditional way of life that Republicans in particular, resonate with, is too engrained and embedded into American politics to be disturbed. However, if the foundations of food culture in the United States are so deep rooted, why is a group of vegans and environmentalists causing such chaos and threat to the well-established cattle industry? Does this mean there is hope for a more sustainable diet culture? There is an extraordinary amount of debate over the "Beef Battle" as the extreme elements of both sides of the war strongly defend their rights. What most people seem to be forgetting, is that both beef eaters and veggie-lovers can live in harmony with each other if the extremes of both sides were less forceful. Whilst American diets will always revolve around meat-eating, I believe that with an increasing online presence of veganism and vegetarianism, there can be a growth of sustainability and focus on the importance of diminishing the environmental

impact of the cattle industry. It must not be forgotten that it is in the best interest of the cattle industry to support the environmental movement and promote sustainable farming. The less impact the industry makes on global warming the less impacted the industry will be by global warming. Whilst social media and environmental awareness has encouraged a rise in veganism and vegetarianism, "Beef State" Nebraska firmly grasps its meat-loving status and with its Republican traditional local government, it will unlikely shake this title. For now, the beef war in Nebraska and the United States remains a complication, interwoven with deep-rooted politics and cultural traditions. It will take more than some 'radical environmentalists' and 'trendy' vegans to disrupt this meat-loving society.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Pete Ricketts, 'Episode 30- Mark McHargue,' in *The Nebraska Way*, Pete Ricketts, podcast, MP3 Audio, 28:05 ; Emily Krempholtz, "Veganism Has Gone Mainstream, But It's Not Just About The Animals Anymore," Buzzworthy, accessed April 27, 2022, <https://www.buzzworthy.com/whats-driving-the-vegan-trend/>.

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