

Nebraska Beef Council

...strengthening demand for beef

www.nebeef.org

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Will Beef Make Your Child a Better Athlete?

The University of Nebraska-Lincoln is conducting research to explore the associations among beef intake, iron status, and athletic performance in Nebraska youth athletes. The study is being conducted with funding from the Nebraska Beef Council and the beef checkoff.

According to the study researchers, iron is one of the most critical micronutrients for athletes, who are about 50% more likely to be iron deficient. This risk is even greater among adolescent athletes who have increased iron demands due to their growth.

“Research shows that even a slight drop in iron stores can reduce sports performance and impair cognitive performance,” said Dr. Karsten Koehler, lead researcher for the study at UNL. “Beef could be an optimal strategy to provide more iron in an athlete’s diet because lean beef provides high amounts of heme-iron, a form of iron that can be easily used by the body,”

The beef checkoff funded study explores effective strategies to improve iron status so that athletes can reach their full athletic and academic potential.

“The goal of our study is to investigate whether consuming more beef is linked to improved athletic performance in youth athletes in Nebraska,” said Dr. Koehler. “To achieve this goal, we compare measures of athletic performance, blood markers of iron status, and dietary beef consumption in youth athletes between the ages of 5 - 18 years. Each athlete completes a series of tests that are commonly used in testing youth and high school athletes. We further collect a small blood sample from the fingertip and have the athletes or their parents complete a diet log.”

Dr. Koehler expects that regular beef consumption will have a positive effect on sports performance and iron status. If confirmed, this information will help consultants educate athletes about the importance of a diet that is rich in iron and the nutritional values of beef.

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The Nebraska Beef Council is a non-profit organization served by a nine-member board of directors. The volunteers oversee Nebraska’s beef checkoff and checkoff-funded programs. Programs for marketing and promotion are funded by the \$1 beef checkoff.