



ARTICLES

TEAM WORK & BEEF WORK MAKE THE DREAM WORK

Nichole Ring of Virginia, Illinois, is the perfect embodiment of both athleticism and cattle raising to represent Team Beef.

By Olivia Hoots

Her heart beats strong as she realizes the finish line is just one half mile away. A flood of memories return, and a smile beams across her face as she feels another runner's high and remembers all that went in to train for another race – early mornings and nutritious (and delicious) meals galore. Will she place? Maybe, she thinks, but it is the smile of her husband and two-year-old son that she's awaiting at the finish line. One step, then another, until she turns the final corner. "He's clapping," she thinks to herself. "I think he sees me." As she crosses the finish line, her husband and son fall into her arms. For this runner, her family make every step worth it.

Racing with Purpose

Fueling the human body with beef is a long-held practice among fitness enthusiasts. That is probably why the Beef Checkoff program Team Beef has become such a success. As producers continue to remind consumers of the value their product provides to our bodies – providing ten essential nutrients such as high protein levels which guarantee increased energy – there is bound to be commotion surrounding the benefits their product provides.

The Team Beef program offers the perfect blend of the entire beef industry supply chain – aka beef industry advocacy paired with nutritional awareness surrounding the beef product. Nichole Ring of Virginia, Illinois, is the perfect embodiment of both things – from working on the farm and raising her son to running competitiveness. Each bring embody Nichole's lifestyle and purpose.

Team Beef

Nichole is someone who has been running for as long as she can remember, even doing track in high school. After that she has "leisurely" participated in many 5Ks and has not stopped running since. It's cemented into the fabric of her day-to-day life, and since she lives on her husband's cattle operation, she knew Illinois Beef's Team Beef program would be the perfect fit.

After taking part in the program in 2021, she returned last year for the program's rebuild. "It's a shared connection of running and beef," Nichole explains.

The pinnacle of her running career was the 2022 Chicago Marathon. Preparation for the race included logging miles, even those of jogging from farm property to farm property for feeding or equipment.

Another aspect of training for Nichole includes nutrition and fueling herself. "I was eating a lot more protein and beef," she says.

Family and Farm Life

This athleticism and nutrition are things she hopes to pass onto her son, beginning with what she feeds him at home. Their family often enjoys Crockpot meals like potatoes and sliders.

Juggling being a farm wife with her job at Syngenta and being a mom, Nichole is always on the go, making is extremely necessary for her to be her best self physically and nutritionally. She ultimately loves teaching her son about farming and nutrition and working as a team with her husband on their farm.

So, when does Nichole have time for running? "I like to run in the morning," she says, "when there is calm and peacefulness, and I can have a moment of quiet." She explains that since there is not much traffic on the country roads in the morning, and the sun is rising, it is the perfect time to gather energy for her day of farm, work and mom life with her "crazy" two-year-old.

Nutrition is also important for Nichole. "Being able to be properly fueled is important," she says. "Especially in recovery from long runs." She often incorporates local products and food from her own garden, plus protein from her own farm's beef cattle and chickens.

"We are a family who eats real food and ingredients," Nichole expresses. She loves that her young son is already showing enthusiasm for cooking too, playing with the pans and helping her cook. From tater-tot casserole to a veggie-topped burger, delicious meals are made in the Ring household's kitchen.

Family nutrition is easy for Nichole – "make it fun and creative," she says. She is excited for her son to soon discover a sport or exercise he likes to stay healthy. "Promoting longevity, that kind of lifestyle is a big thing in our household."

Nutrition Prioritization Leads to Beef Advocacy

Advocacy for the beef industry is a large part of Nichole and her husband's life since their livelihoods depend on beef consumption, and the product fuels her running passion. She says knowing and sharing with others their farm's beef story is essential for their family.

Because they often sell direct-to-consumer, Nichole keeps active on their social media account. She is often sharing on-the-farm stories and letting customers know when there are quarters, halves and wholes ready to be bought.

"We enjoy our customers, both old and new," Nichole shares. "I especially enjoy educating them on what to expect when buying beef in bulk, and making sure the whole process is easy so they will want to come back to us."

The Next Mile

Up ahead on the road for Nichole is another marathon in Des Moines, which she plans to run in the fall. She has the "marathon bug" and is prepping already, now with motherhood and Team Beef a part of it.

There are a few other Illinoisans who are a part of the Team Beef. "The variety of people both seasoned and new make it a great program," Nichole says. She is seeking industry and athletic growth in being a part of the team. With Illinois Beef on her side and miles of country roads to run on, Nichole will have many more races both in life and in a jersey to race!

