



Breeders, Association Staff, Scientists Attend BIF Meeting

Each year I look forward to attending the Beef Improvement Federation (BIF) Annual Research Symposium and Annual Meeting where cattlemen gather and talk about issues facing the beef industry. These issues range from topics as simple as weather conditions to the development of genomics testing and everything in between.

I wasn't able to attend the meetings when I lived in Indiana. I always felt as if I needed to be at home breeding cows, making hay or doing the same things that many of you do each day. However, I always enjoyed reading about the topics that were discussed and covered at the meetings.

The 39th edition of the BIF meeting was at Ft. Collins, Colo., and the Colorado folks did a bang-up job planning the event. The meeting was well attended, and the topics were once again timely. During the past several years, it seems that we have been getting a heavy dose of scientists and breeders harping about the issues of inputs versus outputs (efficiency) and the value and future of genomics and ways they can be incorporated into a genetic analysis.

The American Hereford Association (AHA) has taken a very proactive approach to both of these issues. As most of you know, the AHA is sponsoring research projects around the country that are evaluating the value of incorporating Hereford genetics in commercial cow herds that are predominately Angus based.

These projects, along with the existing data from the National Hereford Feedout contest (formerly Genetic Outreach Program), bull test stations and Australian

research, will arm the AHA and its members with some great ammunition to take to the industry.

A tremendous amount of resources has been committed by the AHA Board to see that this message will be received by the industry.

In your herd

I also want to remind breeders that the issue of inputs versus outputs is one that you can evaluate today within your herd. A couple of months ago, I wrote about trying to fit the performance of your herd and its expected progeny difference (EPD) makeup to your environment and your customers' environments.

EPDs are a valuable tool when you are making genetic progress within your herd, but they need to be used in accordance with your customers' needs. Extremes in many cases can cost your customers a large amount of money and do a disservice to their bottom lines. It is easy to market a high profile set of numbers, but it may be costly in the long run.

One of the first sessions at BIF featured four speakers: Mark Gardiner, Steve Radakovich, Mike Kasten and Chip Ramsey. Each of these gentlemen talked about the value of servicing your customers and working with them in marketing and making sure your genetics are working for them. Each of these speakers seemed to have the same ultimate goals, but they also have a little different approach to getting to them.

Genomics update

As the mapping of the bovine genome continues, the value of genomics testing seems to be getting a mixed review. Obviously everyone seems to agree that this technology will ultimately change the complexion of the beef industry.

Ronnie Green, U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) Agricultural Research Service, gave BIF attendees a great overview of the potential of DNA testing. In time we will be able to use this technology to evaluate young cattle and provide some real accuracy changes early in the life of both sires and dams.

Ultimately DNA technology with progeny evaluation will make the genetic analysis more stable and accurate. In the short term, this technology will probably be most valuable in testing animals for parentage, genetic abnormalities and convenience issues such as horned/poled.

The AHA is working with universities, USDA and DNA companies to discover and to validate markers in efficiency, carcass merit, genetic abnormalities, horned/poled and other areas of economic importance. Jerry Taylor, University of Missouri, warned the audience not to move too quickly today. He gave a glimpse of what the future may hold. Taylor, along with other industry leaders, is developing a panel that may take this technology to the next level.

Improving carcass quality

A couple of past junior Hereford members, Dan Moser and Bob Weaber, gave some interesting presentations on different carcass issues. BIF may look at asking breed associations to calculate a uniform set of carcass EPDs. This could allow some cross-breed comparisons for these traits.

Weaber's presentation included what sacrifices may have to be made when chasing carcass merit. These are issues that can be looked at when chasing any trait. There are antagonisms that are associated with every trait measured,

and we need to make sure we are working in the right direction.

I have asked each of you to focus on improving carcass quality in your genetic selection decisions. I've encouraged you to find, through ultrasound and progeny testing, the genetics that can make progress in this area. Weaber reported that we can make progress without sacrifices when breeding programs are handled properly.

Other discussion topics during the meeting included the across-breed EPD adjustment table that is made available each year by MARC (Meat Animal Research Center). This table allows producers to compare EPDs breed to breed. Another key item discussed was the value of artificial insemination (AI) and ways this technology has progressed through the years.

It was a great meeting. There was a 40-year reflection of BIF given by Ike Eller, Virginia Tech. Eller said, "It is really not about the cattle; cattle don't have ideas, and cattle don't have emotions. Cattle don't have need to make change, but people do."

I would encourage you to see Page 26 of this issue for more BIF highlights and to contact Mark Enns, Colorado State University, at mark.enns@colostate.edu to purchase a copy of the meeting proceedings. It is filled with excellent articles and information.

I also want to congratulate Craig Huffhines for receiving the BIF Continuing Service Award and Angie Denton for being named the BIF Ambassador Award winner. I also want to congratulate both Star Lake Cattle Ranch and CK Ranch for their recognition as seedstock and commercial producers of the year nominees. **HW**

