



# The Editor's Link

by **SHAUNA ROSE HERMEL**, editor

## Lots to think about

Never a disappointment, the Beef Improvement Federation (BIF) Annual Meeting and Research Symposium provided a lot of fodder to think about. Here's a quick glimpse of some of the topics discussed at the July 10-13 conference in Omaha, Neb. Listen to the speeches yourself or read the proceedings papers by visiting our real-time coverage of the event at [www.BIFconference.com](http://www.BIFconference.com).

### Cattle can be profitable

South Dakota State University's Barry Dunn described the beef industry as a mature industry with a low return on assets (ROA). While U.S. businesses average 10% ROA, cattle enterprises average 2%-3%. That more than anything, he said, is the reason more than half of the industry's producers exited the business in the last 30 years.

Dunn provided an overview of Standardized Performance Analysis (SPA) measurements for low-, moderate- and high-profit cow herds. The ROA for the bottom 16% averaged

-15.5%, while the middle 68% averaged 2.9%. The top 16%, however, averaged an ROA of 18.2%.

### A cow maintenance EPD

John Evans, Oklahoma State University, outlined a prototype expected progeny difference (EPD) for cow maintenance energy requirements completed for the Red Angus breed. The EPD is expressed in megacalories (Mcal) per year.

The current EPD formula uses equations from the current version of the National Research Council guidelines for beef cattle nutrition, along with mature weight and milk EPDs. In the future, Evans said, the formula may be refined with other indicator traits, such as body condition, visceral organ size and cell-level indicators of maintenance energy requirements.

### Aussies taking the lead

Australian researchers have developed an estimated breeding value

(EBV) to aid selection for net feed intake (NFI), reported David Johnston, University of New England, New South Wales. Results suggest selection for reduced NFI may enhance efficiency achieved by animals that are genetically able to eat less, without reducing growth.

### Individual feed needs

Cornell University's Danny Fox explained the Cornell Value Discovery System (CVDS), which estimates feed requirements for individuals in a pen-feeding system. The computer model accounts for variations in breed type, management and environment as it determines the amount of specific feed ration needed to reach a target final weight and finish. Cornell is beta-testing the CVDS software Version 1.0.0, available via e-mail to Michelle Cole at [mlc44@cornell.edu](mailto:mlc44@cornell.edu).

### Defining efficiency

Virginia Tech's David Notter defined biological efficiency as "the capacity to convert physical inputs (feed) into

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marketable product (beef) under prevailing production conditions." Traits that support biological efficiency in the brood cow are generally different from those associated with efficient postweaning calf growth, Notter admitted. Improved forage utilization and reproductive performance will enhance cow efficiency, while efficiency in the growing market animal is achieved through a balance of appetite and lean growth potential.

### Congratulations to award winners

Several Association members and commercial Angus producers were recognized at the BIF meeting. See page 43 for a recap of the award winners.

