

Pertinent news from across the country.

Compiled by Shauna Hermel, editor

CAB, Sysco offer BQA training experience

Certified Angus Beef (CAB) is partnering with Sysco to extend Beef Quality Assurance (BQA) efforts through the *Raised with Respect™* campaign. The entities are working with key states, cattlemen's associations and educators to offer BQA education events that go beyond the norm.

Cattlemen and their families are invited to attend a BQA Workshop Saturday, Feb. 24, at the Round the Bend Steakhouse in Ashland, Neb. The event is hosted in conjunction with Nebraska BQA.

Obtain your BQA certification, recertify or keep your current certification. Youth exhibiting 4-H or FFA animals will have opportunity to acquire their

Youth for the Quality Care of Animals (YQCA) certification, a requirement to show livestock in Nebraska.

YQCA training begins at 10 a.m., followed by a lunch featuring the CAB brand at 11 a.m. The BQA Workshop begins at noon.

John Cook, head coach of the University of Nebraska volleyball team, will speak at 3:15 p.m. Attendees will be able to meet and greet Coach Cook and players at 3:45. Activities conclude at 4:45.

Additional BQA workshops scheduled include:

- ▶ Feb. 10 at the Iowa Beef Expo;
- ▶ June 25 in Kansas; and
- ▶ April 12 in Kentucky at the Hardin County Extension Office.

For more information, visit <https://cabcattle.com/raisedwithrespect/>.

ARC, PLC programs available for 2024

The one-year extension of the 2018 *Farm Bill* extended availability of the Farm Service Agency's (FSA) Agriculture Risk Coverage (ARC) and Price Loss Coverage (PLC) programs, USDA announced. As of Dec. 18, ag producers could enroll and make election changes for the 2024 crop year.

The deadline to complete enrollment and make any election change is March 15, 2024.

For more information, visit <https://www.fsa.usda.gov/>.

2024 BIF Symposium program announced

The 2024 Beef Improvement Federation (BIF) Research Symposium and Convention will be convened June 10-13 in Knoxville, Tenn. The symposium features 2½ days of educational programming focused on improving maternal traits and efficiency.

Monday, June 10, kicks off with the Young Producer Symposium at 1 p.m., followed by the welcome and scholarship reception. Monday evening a feeder-cattle panel will focus on capturing value of improved genetics and health.

Tuesday's general session will focus on "Building a Better Cow" and will include presentations by

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2024 Angus Foundation Heifer Package sells for \$52,500

Express Ranches of Yukon, Okla., purchased the Angus Foundation Heifer Package on Jan. 5 for \$52,500. The package, donated by Yon Family Farms of Ridge Spring, S.C., led off the National Angus Bull Sale during Cattlemen's Congress in Oklahoma City. Since 1980, the heifer package has been sold to generate unrestricted funds to further the Angus Foundation's mission of supporting education, youth and research for the breed.

Yon Family Farms donated Yon Sarah K1233 (AAA *20450734) to headline the 2024 Angus Foundation Heifer Package. The bred heifer is a maternal sister to Yon Top Cut G730 (AAA +*19476453) and Yon Saluda (AAA +*20336998). Yon Sarah K1233 is safe in calf to Yon Toccoa F1054 (AAA +*19306162), with an anticipated due date of March 21.

The heifer package also includes an advanced reproductive technology package from Trans Ova Genetics, trucking to the buyer donated by Lathrop Livestock Transportation and 30 days of mortality insurance donated by Jeanne Conover, livestock insurance agent with Conover Auction Service.

"We just appreciate the opportunity to give back in a small way," said Kevin Yon of Yon Family Farms. Kevin and Lydia Yon started the operation in 1996, and now work alongside their three children,

Sally, Drake and Corbin, who each returned to the farm after attending college. The Yons host both a spring and fall production sale, selling around 425 registered Angus bulls and 200 females annually.

"The Yon family brought us an incredible female to offer for this year's heifer package," said Jaclyn Boester, Angus Foundation executive director. "Their generosity, coupled with the incredible support from Express Ranches, will help us continue creating opportunities for the next generation."

The Angus Foundation supports a diverse set of efforts focused on ensuring a bright future for the breed. Academic scholarships, leadership conferences and cutting-edge research are among the many programs sustained by the Angus Fund.



The 2024 Angus Foundation Heifer Package, donated by Yon Family Farms of Ridge Spring, S.C., was purchased by Express Ranches of Yukon, Okla., for \$52,500.

Jared Decker, University of Missouri; Darrh Bullock, University of Kentucky; Bob Weaber, Kansas State University; and Dave Lalman, Oklahoma State University.

Wednesday's general session will continue the theme of building maternal excellence. Speakers will include Christine Baes, University of Guelph; Larry Kuehn, U.S. Meat Animal Research Center; and Mike Coffey, Scotland's Rural College.

Tuesday and Wednesday afternoon technical breakout sessions will focus on a range of beef-production and genetic-improvement topics.

For more information, visit www.bifsymposium.com. Prior to and during this year's symposium, be sure to follow the event on social media channels using the hashtag #BIF2024.

K-State Cattlemen's Day March 1

Kansas State University's (K-State) Animal Sciences and Industry Department (ASI) will host Cattlemen's Day 2024 Friday, March 1, at Weber Hall in Manhattan, Kan.

"We're excited to announce our 111th KSU Cattlemen's Day program," says A.J. Tarpoff, K-State associate professor and Cattlemen's Day co-chairman. "Our goal is to share the latest information and research with attendees to better prepare them for management decisions in the upcoming year."

The day starts at 8 a.m. with refreshments, educational exhibits and a commercial trade show on the floor of Weber Arena. Richard Linton, K-State president, will kick off the

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Farm family mental health and well-being services revolutionized

A landmark alliance is launching free, anonymous, online mental health and well-being services to provide a nationwide safety net of confidential and on-demand support to farmers, ranchers and farm families. Unveiled at the American Farm Bureau Federation (AFBF) 2024 Convention, Farm Family Wellness Alliance's solution harnesses the best resource to build farm family wellness — access to a community, including a network of farmers and ranchers who understand the challenges and rewards that come with the ag way of life.

Access to services starts at Togetherall, a safe, clinically moderated peer-to-peer community, where members listen, support and give members' mental well-being a boost. Through an anonymous profile, users can access a global network of peers, backed by the safeguarding of licensed clinicians overseeing the community around-the-clock. Access to the platform is available to farm-family members 16 and older.

Farmers and their families also will have access to an ag sector sub-group to share or read others' experiences in a safe, judgment-free zone.

"Farming is tough, even on the best days. That's why Farm Bureau has been committed to helping farmers and ranchers across the country get connected with the tools and resources they need to

promote mental health and well-being — and to check in on their friends, neighbors and loved ones,” said AFBF President Zippy Duvall. “It’s OK not to be OK, but it’s not OK not to reach out when you’re hurting. We are grateful for how this partnership will strengthen our rural communities and provide the support we all need.”

The Farm Family Wellness Alliance is made possible through a coalition, including Farm Foundation, AFBF, Farm Credit, CoBank, Iowa Farm Bureau, CHS, Land O’Lakes, National Farmers Union, 4-H, FFA, Agriculture Future of America, Togetherall and Personal Assistance Services. This coalition makes it possible to offer services to farm families nationwide.

“Farm Foundation has been working towards the goal of improving farmer access to mental health and other wellness services for several years with the Farm Family Wellness Alliance pilot starting in 2020 after the derecho in Iowa,” said Shari Rogge-Fidler, president and CEO of Farm Foundation. “We are pleased to have been able to bring together this coalition of farmer-serving organizations into a partnership that allowed us to expand the program nationwide and will offer so much direct and immediate benefit to American farmers.”

Togetherall also offers a range of well-being tools, such as self-assessments and access to additional support services through a partnership with Personal Assistance Services. Topics covered include anxiety, depression, financial health, improving sleep and more.

“Navigating the challenges of farming can be tough, and other

farmers are often the only other people who can understand the unique stressors of the industry. Anonymous, safe, online peer support is a critical component on the mental health support continuum, and especially important in reaching communities such as farmers, who may otherwise not reach out for support,” said Matthew McEvoy, CEO of Togetherall.

“Farm Credit recognizes the challenges America’s farmers and ranchers face, especially related to mental health and stress. Fewer resources exist in rural areas as compared to urban areas,” said Todd Van Hoose, president and CEO of Farm Credit Council. “This free, anonymous, and safe access to mental health support offers assistance in a way nothing has before for rural Americans.”

To learn more about the Farm Family Wellness Alliance and the services available through the Togetherall platform, visit www.farmfoundation.org/farm-family-wellness-alliance/.



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program at 10 a.m., discussing the university's strategy for the future. ASI Department Head Mike Day will share how ASI plans to embrace the past and look to the future. Glynn Tonsor, K-State ag economist, will present a beef industry economic outlook.

Afternoon sessions will feature K-State faculty and industry presentations in Weber Hall 123, 146 and 111 discussing an array of topics, including:

- ▶ K-State ASI Beef Research Update, ASI beef team;
- ▶ Beef Cuts that Add Value, Michael Chao, K-State ASI associate professor;
- ▶ Reproduction Update, Sandy Johnson, K-State ASI extension beef specialist, and Nicholas Dias, K-State ASI assistant professor; and
- ▶ Wildlife and Ranching, Drew Ricketts, K-State extension

wildlife management and control specialist.

Registration is \$25 if paid by Feb. 23, or \$35 at the door. There is no charge for students who preregister. For more information and online registration, visit www.ksubeef.org.

The 47th Annual Legacy Bull & Female Sale will begin at 4 p.m. at the Stanley Stout Center. Visit <https://www.asi.k-state.edu/about/services/legacy/> to learn more about this year's offering and to request a sale book.

Galen and Lori Fink will be honored as the Stockman of the Year at the Annual Stockmen's Dinner at 6 p.m. Feb. 29 at the Stanley Stout Center. A separate registration is required for the dinner. Information is online at <https://www.asi.k-state.edu/stockmensdinner/>.

USDA launches pilot to help processors access high-value beef grading

Ag Secretary Tom Vilsack announced Jan. 19 a pilot program to allow more cattle producers and meat processors to access better markets through the USDA's official beef quality grading and certification. The Remote Grading Pilot for Beef, developed by USDA's Agricultural Marketing Service (AMS), matches simple technology with robust data management and program oversight to allow a USDA grader to assess beef carcass characteristics and assign the official quality grade from a remote location, reducing costs and location as barriers to participation in voluntary grading services.

Secretary Vilsack announced

the new pilot during a panelist discussion with livestock producers and independent meat-processing business owners in conjunction with the National Western Stock Show in Denver, Colo. In addition to the pilot, Secretary Vilsack highlighted USDA programs in the West that create economic prosperity for farms, ranches and rural communities by supporting on-farm conservation, bolstering new markets, creating jobs, and keeping farming and ranching viable for the next generation. Today's announcement builds on USDA's comprehensive approach to increase competition in ag markets, create a fairer playing field for small- and mid-size farmers and ranchers, and provide producers more options to market their products.

"On average, a beef carcass

that grades as USDA Prime is valued at hundreds of dollars more than an ungraded carcass, but costs for this voluntary USDA service often prevents smaller-scale processors and the farmers and ranchers they serve from using this valuable marketing tool,” Secretary Vilsack said. “This remote grading pilot opens the door for additional packers and processors to receive grading and certification services, allowing them to access new, better and more diverse marketing opportunities.”

Consumers as well as buyers and sellers of beef rely on USDA quality grades, including Prime, Choice and Select, as a clear and standardized way to indicate quality. Everyone involved in the beef supply chain, from cattle producers to beef consumers, benefit from the greater

efficiency permitted by the application of official U.S. grade standards.

USDA offers these services to packers and processors on a user-fee basis. While greater than 90% of America’s fed-beef supply is officially graded by USDA, most users are large beef-packing operations. USDA’s meat grading and certification services are significantly underutilized by small, independent processors, in large part due to the expense of paying for a highly trained USDA grader to travel to their facility to perform service in-person for a relatively small number of cattle that may not require a full day of the grader’s work. Experience with remote grading so far has shown it dramatically reduces travel-related expenses, which makes the service more accessible to smaller processors.

In this pilot, trained plant employees capture specific images of the live animal and beef carcass. These images are submitted electronically to a USDA grader already stationed elsewhere in the United States, likely located in another rural community, who reviews the images and accompanying plant records and product data, assigns the USDA Quality Grade and applicable carcass certification programs, and communicates the official grade back to the plant to be applied to the carcass. Plants can then use this information in their retail marketing and transmit carcass performance information back to producers.

The pilot will build on lessons learned during AMS’ feasibility study of a “remote grading” process conducted during the second half of 2023. AMS will

expand its testing by engaging a larger and more diverse number of beef packers to participate in the development of this procedure. Through the pilot, AMS will gather additional information on actual cost and the level of in-person surveillance needed to ensure program consistency and integrity to formalize this innovative service option as part of the USDA Quality Grading Service.

The Remote Grading Pilot for Beef is limited to domestic beef slaughter facilities operating under federal inspection and producing product that meets the eligibility criteria for the USDA grading program.

For more information about the Remote Grading Pilot for Beef, visit www.ams.usda.gov/remote-beef-grading or email asklp@usda.gov. **ABB**