

Managing for Success

Symposium focuses on achieving profitability through a quality focus.

Certified Angus Beef LLC (CAB) hosted a “Managing for Success” symposium at the Gering Civic Center Monday evening, Nov. 28, 2011, prior to the Range Beef Cow Symposium XXII. Attendees were treated to *Certified Angus Beef*® (CAB®) ribeyes and three presentations at the event, which was sponsored by Land O’Lakes Purina Feed.

Mark McCully, assistant vice president of supply development for CAB, focused on the new genetic tools available to commercial Angus producers to target premium quality after he first laid the groundwork for why that is in the best interests of individual producers and the beef industry. He also unveiled a new Angus-specific DNA test, called GeneMax™, that will be available to commercial cattlemen in early 2012.

A feedlot veterinarian at the University of Nebraska Great Plains Veterinary Education Center, Dee Griffin addressed how cattle health and health mistakes affect performance and profitability.

Referencing a paper compiled by Western Kentucky University professor Nevil Speer, CAB’s Larry Corah addressed how changing industry needs have

created opportunity for Angus genetics, contributing to the increasing prevalence of Angus genetics in U.S. cow herds.

Here are some of the nuggets from their presentations. For additional information, visit the newsroom at www.rangebeefcow.com.

Genetic tools to meet demand

Despite a rough economy, the CAB brand has continued to post record-breaking months and years, said McCully. This product success is a long-term trend; international and domestic consumers are willing to pay for the product even in a questionable economy.

The reason? Because the product performs for the consumer, McCully said, attributing much of the success in meeting consumer demand to marbling, which is a highly heritable trait.

Many producers ask what they have to give up to increase marbling, referring to genetic antagonisms between traits that might negatively affect their cow herd. But McCully presented research by the U.S. Meat Animal Research Center (USMARC), the University of Nebraska and the American Angus Association showing



PHOTOS BY TROY SMITH

Mark McCully unveiled GeneMax™ as a tool for commercial cattlemen to use to target carcass premiums. The Angus-specific DNA test will launch in early 2012.

negative genetic correlations between marbling and cow weight (-0.15), cow height (-0.17), body condition score (-0.03), calving rate (-0.05) and calving difficulty (-0.09). There was a strong positive correlation with weaning weight (+0.21) and milk (+0.22), indicating producers don’t have to lose much in the cow herd.

McCully also referenced a white paper titled “Relationship Between Quality Grade and Feedlot Profitability,” which reported that marbling can double profitability in the feedlot.

“The only aspect of a cattle operation that we as producers have total control over is genetics,” he quoted from Mike Kasten.

McCully emphasized the many measurements used in the livestock industry, and said that the newest is genomic-enhanced expected progeny differences (GE EPDs). He explained that these GE EPDs give “a lot better and clearer picture of genetic potential of the animal” — and at an earlier age. GE EPDs are not separate from EPDs, they are incorporated into them.

When producers ask him what data they should use in selecting a bull, McCully said he recommends use of GE EPDs. He also suggested using CAB’s *Cow-Calf Best Practices Manual*, which offers genetic recommendations that compare breeds.

McCully unveiled a new tool to target carcass premiums, CAB’s GeneMax, which is set to launch in early 2012. This new tool is an Angus-specific DNA test to predict marbling and growth. Designed for commercial cattlemen using registered Angus bulls, it will aid in selection and marketing of replacement heifers and serve as a decision and marketing tool for feeder cattle at the ranch or at the feedlot.

The test kits will be ordered through

Angus Genetics Inc. (AGI) and will cost \$15-\$20 per test. The samples are returned to AGI and sent to Pfizer Animal Genetics for genotyping. AGI will provide test results to the customer.

GeneMax is being designed to test replacement heifer candidates for in-herd selection; as a value-added feature for selling commercial heifers; to test feeder calves for marketing decisions, carcass merit feedback, and/or value-added marketing; and as a management tool at the feedlot.

McCully noted that this tool could provide significant improvement in a short amount of time.

— by Kasey Miller

Health and health mistakes

Griffin has spent most of his veterinary career dealing with bovine respiratory disease (BRD) in feedlot cattle. He says there is a long list of viral infections and secondary bacterial infections that result in costly respiratory disease among newly arrived feedlot cattle. It’s costly because of the money invested in preventing disease, and later treating the calves that get sick anyway. There is also the cost of lost cattle performance, because disease negatively affects average daily gain, feed conversion and carcass merit.



“One thing that is critical to having a calf remain healthy in the feedyard is being born to a healthy mother,” said Dee Griffin.

Griffin said early diagnosis and treatment of respiratory disease is a tough job. Until they are really sick, most calves do a good job of hiding it, he explained. Among cattle found to have lung lesions at harvest, up to 58% had never been identified as sick and had never received any treatment.

He reviewed important aspects of early detection and treatment of calves, but also

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stressed the importance of minimizing the incidence of disease. He questioned the wisdom of vaccinating calves or mass medicating them upon arrival at a feedlot, noting pre-arrival management may be the most important factor supporting calf health in the feedlot.

“One thing that is critical to having

a calf remain healthy in the feedyard is being born to a healthy mother,” stated Griffin, emphasizing the importance of the dam’s nutrition and health management. He stressed the need for immunizing the breeding herd against disease associated with BRD.

“Every heifer that enters the herd

should have received a series of three shots, typically given at branding, preweaning or weaning, and at prebreeding. She should get a prebreeding booster every year after that,” advised Griffin.

— *by Troy Smith*

Crossbreeding — not so free

Corah noted that 50% of the national cow herd is currently classified as being

high-percentage or straight British (Angus, Hereford, etc.), and 75% of cow herds in the U.S. today utilize some Angus genetics.

Speer’s white paper addressed the question: Why are about half the producers in the United States using a commercial Angus herd when crossbreeding offers hybrid vigor advantages? The paper, titled “Crossbreeding: A free lunch, but at what cost?,” outlines the present-day changes in genetics, marketing and costs that have prompted producers to use commercial Angus genetics rather than crossbreeding.

“There are places crossbreeding works extremely well,” Corah said, “but others have gone a simpler route of using a commercial black Angus-based herd — and that trend continues to increase.”

Corah stated, “Cattle genetics today are dramatically different than they were 10 years ago. Producers can do things within breeds that they could only do with crossbreeding five to 10 years ago.”

He also noted that today’s genetics offer more predictability than what was available in the past. He said, “The vast majority of first-calf heifers are bred to Angus because they offer predictable genetics.”

Additionally, Corah shared that research has shown not all heterosis is positive — with birth weight being a prime example.

“Heterosis adds pounds to weaning and yearling weights,” he allowed, “but it also adds 1.6 to 1.7 additional pounds of birth weight.”

Another factor that he credits toward the increasing use of straight commercial Angus genetics is convenience.

“Many operations are not very big, so simplicity is important. Often they see straight Angus as easier to use than crossbreeding to manage their available time and labor and for understanding EPDs.”

Lastly, Corah noted that quality is still king in the marketplace.

“People expect a positive eating experience,” he said, adding that today’s market signals indicate that Prime quality and tenderness are gaining more attention. “They are becoming a bigger industry issue.”

Corah noted that Angus genetics have a proven track record of producing consistently high-quality beef. That reputation has bolstered the use of Angus genetics.

In closing, Corah shared a quote from Tom Brink of JBS Five Rivers Cattle Feeding, who has said: “We like cattle that are ¾ Angus and ¼ Continental — or — straightbred Angus steers. But in both cases, the important thing is to use the right genetics.”

Corah concluded, “Crossbreeding and the hybrid-vigor advantages it provides is solid science. But other production systems such as straightbred commercial Angus herds can — and are — being successfully used in the industry.”

To read Speer’s full research paper, visit www.CABpartners.com.

— *by Kindra Gordon*