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September 21, 2009

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Photo available on request

Dix honored at McPherson County Feeders

Dara Dix will tell you there's no secret to her success, though she may balk at taking credit for it.

You could call her "the secretary" at McPherson County Feeders Inc., a Certified Angus Beef LLC (CAB) licensee near Marquette, Kan. But neither that nor her job description are enough to justify her selection as 2009 CAB Quality Assurance (QA) Officer of the Year. Still, she earned the honor.

Dix's attention to detail and friendly demeanor help the central Kansas yard enroll more than 6,500 cattle each year in CAB's Feedlot Licensing Program (FLP) with an 84% data capture rate. That's the ratio of how much information actually gets through the process from start to finish, and it's one of the highest among 65 CAB feedlots nationwide.

The QA award honors commitment to quality and dedication to the program. Beef cattle specialist Gary Fike of CAB says Dix shows all that and more. "She always wants to do what's right," he says. "Her cheerfulness and willingness to serve customer needs has enabled McPherson County Feeders to become a stellar partner in the FLP."

Although Dix has helped improve results at the 10,000-head feedlot in many ways, she never thought she would work in the beef cattle industry for long, let alone eight years. She wasn't raised on a farm or ranch, nor did she grow up showing cattle at the local county fair. As a girl in Plainville, Kan., 120 miles to the northwest, her agriculture knowledge consisted of watching trucks bring wheat to the town elevator where her father worked.

After going to college for accounting and working at a convenience store and for a cable company, Dix says, "I never thought I would know cattle prices and why marbling is important."

McPherson County Feeders works with customers from Kentucky, West Virginia, Missouri, Oklahoma and Kansas, to name a few. Dix reports carcass information from the CAB database back to those producers on a regular basis.

"I talk to customers about anything and everything," she says. "They may want to know their pay weights or if their cattle have come in, or we may just talk about how their family is doing."

Feedlot manager of 28 years and recently owner as well, Allan Sents knows the importance of having a strong customer base. He says Dix understands the goal of serving through the CAB program.

“Sharing the recorded feedback on carcass information with our producers is a priority,” Sents says. “Dara is always on top of it and works hard to maintain our feedlot’s credibility.”

Efficiency and effectiveness clearly define the methodology for success. She uses color-coded labels to manage all the accounts. “My CAB labels are green and my source ID labels are purple; that way they are all easily accessible to me,” Dix says.

Duties such as feed inputs and billing became routine long ago. “If it is a billing day, I will immediately start inputting feed right away to print off commodity sheets so Allan can figure pricing.”

Between talking with producers and corresponding with CAB data manager Wendy Nichols, communication is crucial for all. “If Allan and I didn’t communicate about pricing or certain data entries, then that could hurt our customers,” Dix says. “When one of us is going to be gone, we make sure to have our ducks in a row before leaving.”

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