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NEWS

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Darrell Busby, Iowa State Extension, 712-769-2600

Informing an industry

TCSCF wins Progressive Partner award

When the Iowa Tri-County Steer Carcass Futurity (TCSCF) started in 1982 it was like many other feedout programs of the day, it covered a local geography and producers entered just a few head. The winner got a \$1,000 check and bragging rights.

But early on, supervising area Extension livestock specialist Darrell Busby and the directing board of cow-calf producers saw greater potential.

The focus became identifying factors that influence profitability. Recognizing a history of cooperation with Certified Angus Beef LLC (CAB) through its licensed feedlots, the brand named TCSCF the 2009 Progressive Partner of the Year. Busby accepted the honor on behalf of Iowa State Extension and the 11 participating feedyards at the CAB annual conference in Scottsdale, Ariz., Sept. 18.

Vaccination and weaning programs were among the first recommendations to surface.

“It was really eye-opening that healthy, faster-gaining cattle would grade,” Busby says. “We were excited when we sorted that out.”

Now, more than 40 individual data points are collected on each animal, from temperament to carcass data, allowing for several after-the-fact analyses.

“The thoroughness of the data managed by Darrell Busby and his counterparts adds much more potential for information than most futurities even begin to collect,” says Larry Corah, CAB vice president for supply development. “TCSCF has provided some invaluable information for the industry.”

Producers send from one to 700 head, but all the cattle are treated the same on feed.

“All of the research work we have done has been retrospective. We try to do the best job we can with the cattle, and then we go back and ask ourselves why we see some differences,” Busby says.

TCSCF research pointed out that modified live virus (MLV) vaccines are more effective than killed ones. Backed by history, the program advised preconditioning for at least 30 days, preferring 45

days before cattle enter its feedlots. History would also reveal higher percentage Angus genetics had a direct correlation with better quality grade and other profit advantages.

“Accessing this data answered a lot of questions for us,” Corah says. “Twelve years ago, we didn’t know how a lot of management factors impacted quality grade.”

A big part of its strength is in the numbers. Starting with 105 head from 35 consigners, today there are 600 producers from 16 states and Canada sending cattle to the network of small Iowa feedyards; 70,433 head have been recorded in the TCSCF 27-year history.

From a research standpoint, streamlined processes and procedures across all cooperating feedlots offer another bonus. One visiting consigner commented that TCSCF functions almost like a single feedyard with a dozen locations.

“A side benefit is that these feedlots have helped each other get better, too,” Busby says. “They are really good at sharing what they are doing.”

That’s really the heart of the program. Cow-calf producers and feedlots report their information, and the futurity puts it all together. Then it’s disseminated back to all those parties and shared in general terms with the entire industry.

Busby insists it’s not just about the livestock.

“This is a people business and the cattle happen to be what we are using to try and produce a better quality product,” he says.

He credits the staff of six part and full-time employees with keeping everything running smoothly. All the important components like receiving and carcass data collection are coordinated by this team, which includes manager John Woltmann, who has been with TCSCF since 2006.

Perhaps nobody could have predicted its success in volume or relevancy to the beef industry, but Corah credits individual leadership.

“The vision Darrell had for what this program could do – not only for cattle producers in Iowa, but across the U.S. – that’s what drove it,” Corah says. “I feel like we’re also recognizing what he’s accomplished.”

Although Extension cuts are forcing the program to reorganize, the board wants to continue to grow, offering new reports and benchmarking.

“The board members have identified problems they want to address by demonstrating there may be a more profitable way to do it,” Busby says. “They know if you give people data they will produce more consistent cattle.”

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