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Mississippi Beef Cattle Improvement Association

Mississippi Beef Cattle Improvement Association—Productivity and Quality

National Beef Quality Audit Reveals Industry Successes, Challenges

Initial results from National Beef Audit 2005, funded in part by checkoff investments in the Beef Quality Assurance Program, are in and offer U.S. cattlemen insight into beef quality successes and future challenges over which they have some or all control.

Identified in the new audit as the **top three quality successes since the 2000 audit were: (1) improved microbiological safety; (2) improved cattle genetics and beef of higher quality; and (3) fewer injection-site lesions.** The rankings are from interviews with beef end-users, including exporters, purveyors, foodservice and retail channels.

Of note to producers, as more foreign markets reopen to U.S. beef, was the response from beef exporters on the question, **"What one quality attribute could U.S. cattlemen change to make it easier for you to export beef products?."** Exporters' response: **"source and age verification,"** followed by "more marbling."

Asked to cite "the gold standard" for high-quality beef in foreign markets, exporters ranked U.S. Prime No. 1, followed by U.S. Choice. As for the perception foreign buyers have about U.S. beef flavor and tenderness, 100 percent of those surveyed rated tenderness as "very good." Seventy percent rated the flavor of U.S. beef as "excellent," while 30 percent gave the rating of "very good."

As for new opportunities in the "natural" market, respondents predicted just over a 14 percent increase in domestic consumer demand for "natural" beef products in the next 10 years, while international demand is expected to grow by just over 10 percent.

"Lack of uniformity/consistency in quality" was ranked by end-users as the No. 1 defect in the U.S. beef industry. That lack was further defined by four things: (presence) of marbling; tenderness; palatability; and inconsistency among and within quality grades.

Other defects identified included cuts being too large for foodservice/restaurant trade; excess fat; abscesses/lesions in cuts, trimmings and variety meats; blood splashed muscle; pathogens and food safety; dark cutting muscle/lack of uniformity in size/shape/weight; blood clots in cuts and trimmings; bruises; and lack of traceability to meet export requirements.

The national audit was conducted by researchers and scientists from Colorado State University (Fort Collins); Texas A&M University (College Station); Oklahoma State University (Stillwater); and West Texas A&M University (Canyon).

The study was conducted between July 2005 and June 2006. The work included interviews with beef and beef product export decision-makers, and with purveyors, restaurants, foodservice operators and supermarket officials.

Specific quality data were collected at 16 U.S. packing plants. The audit collected data for live cattle, carcasses/offal items on the harvest floor and carcasses after chilling and after ribbing at the 12th/13th rib interface.

The beef audit is conducted every five years. It is part of the Beef Quality Assurance Program, which was initiated by producers in 1982 and is the nation's oldest pre-harvest herd management education program. Programs that certify trained producers in quality pre-harvest practices are active in 47 states. Program materials are funded by the beef checkoff.

Source: Checkoff News, National Cattlemen's Beef Association, www.beefusa.org

Upcoming events:

- **September 1—Nomination deadline for the 2006 Mississippi BCIA Fall Bull Sale**
- September 5—Beef Quality Assurance Training, Forrest County Multipurpose Complex, Hattiesburg, MS, 6:00 p.m. to 8:00 p.m.
- September 6—Getting Back on Track After Katrina Beef Short Course, Forrest County Multipurpose Complex, Hattiesburg, MS, 9:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m.
- September 12—Beef Quality Assurance Training, North MS Research and Extension Center, Verona, MS, 7:00 p.m. to 9:00 p.m.
- October 19-21—MSU-ES Artificial Insemination School, Prairie Research Unit, Prairie, MS
- November 6, 14—Beef Cattle Herd Health Short Course, Distance education sites throughout MS, AL, and LA
- November 9—Mississippi BCIA Annual Fall Bull Sale, Hinds Community College Bull Sale Facility, Raymond, MS, 12:00 noon

Inside this issue:

USDA Focuses Programs to Aid Drought Regions

Visit your local USDA office or www.usda.gov for information on disaster assistance programs

On August 29, 2006, Agriculture Secretary Mike Johanns announced $780 million in assistance to help farmers and ranchers manage drought and weather related production challenges. This funding includes a new $50 million program for livestock producers impacted by drought, focusing nearly $30 million in unused conservation funds on drought, and accelerating the delivery of an estimated $700 million in counter-cyclical payments.

"While some parts of the country are experiencing very good crop conditions, drought is taking a toll on farming and ranching operations in other areas of the United States this year," said Johanns. "Today's actions emphasize USDA's commitment to use every resource available to help farmers and ranchers who are impacted by drought."

Livestock Assistance

The new $50 million program for livestock producers, called the Livestock Assistance Grant Program, will provide $50 million in Section 32 to states in block grant form. States will distribute to livestock producers in counties that were designated as D3 or D4 on the Drought Monitor anytime between March 7 and August 31, 2006. The grants will help livestock producers restore their purchasing power. A list of eligibility criteria and eligible counties can be found at *http://www.usda.gov* by clicking on the drought spotlight.

Conservation Funds

The nearly $30 million in unused conservation funds includes almost $19 million in unused Emergency Conservation Program (ECP) funds and $11 million in unused Grassland Reserve Program (GRP). The ECP funds will go to 27 states. Information on eligibility and a list of the states and funding is also posted online. The GRP funds will help to protect drought-affected grazing lands. The funds will be distributed to 14 states. These funds will be focused on pending GRP applications for rental agreements in drought-affected areas.

Johanns also directed the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) state conservationists to work with their producers and state technical committees to focus remaining FY 2006 and a portion of FY 2007 conservation program funds on resource conservation practices related to drought response and mitigation. Programs such as the Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP), the Wildlife Habitat Incentives Program (WHIP), the Agricultural Management Assistance (AMA) program, and GRP have built-in flexibility and local decision-making ability in order to encourage a focus on state-specific concerns, such as those related to drought.

Counter-Cyclical Payments

Johanns directed that 2005-crop year counter-cyclical payments be delivered as quickly as possible to expand the financial resources of farmers facing drought.
An estimated $700 million in payments to upland cotton and grain sorghum producers will be made this week. This will constitute the earliest delivery of counter-cyclical payments on record. Payments to peanut producers will also be expedited, following the calculation of the final 2005 average price.

Existing USDA Disaster Assistance

As always, emergency loans are available to help producers in counties declared disaster areas. These low-interest loans are for producers who have suffered production or physical losses resulting from a natural disaster or quarantine in counties designated disaster areas by President Bush, or disaster or quarantine areas by Secretary Johanns.

Prior to this announcement, USDA has allocated over $30 million in emergency conservation program and emergency watershed protection program funds for 2006 disasters, including drought. The agency has released considerable Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) acreage to emergency haying and grazing and lowered the rental rate reduction to 10 percent from 25 percent.

Federal crop insurance and the Noninsured Crop Disaster Assistance Program (NAP) are also available to crop producers each year to help mitigate the risks associated with the adverse affects of heat and drought. Producers enrolled a record-high 246 mil-

"…USDA announced $780 million in assistance to help farmers and ranchers manage drought and weather related production challenges…"

USDA Programs (Cont.)

lion acres in crop insurance in 2005, with nearly 90 percent of acres insured at levels above the minimum catastrophic level of coverage. Similar enrollment levels are expected this year. In addition, NAP is available for producers who grow crops for which crop insurance is not available.

More information about this drought assistance package and existing USDA disaster assistance is available at *http://www.usda.gov*.

"…Deadlines for nominating bulls to central test stations are approaching."

Bull Test Nominations being Accepted

Producers interested in performance testing bulls through either the Hinds Community College Bull Test or the South Mississippi Gain on Forage Bull Test should make note of the following dates:

Hinds Community College Bull Test
Bulls delivered to test—October 10, 2006
Test begins—October 24, 2006
Test ends—February 13, 2007
Sale—March 1, 2007

South Mississippi Gain on Forage Bull Test
Nomination deadline—October 1, 2006
Bulls delivered to test—November 4, 2006
Sale for fall-born bulls—May 8, 2007
Sale for spring-born bulls—July 2007

The Hinds Community College Bull Test is a 112-day feed-based gain performance test held annually at the Hinds Community College Bull Test Station in Raymond, Mississippi. For more information on the test, contact Kenny Banes at 601-857-3351.

The South Mississippi Gain on Forage Bull Test is based in Tylertown, MS and is a 140-day test. Contact Lamar Adams in the Walthall County Extension office at 601-876-4021 or Frank Holmes, test manager at 601-876-5204 for more details.

Forage Brassicas for Fall Grazing

With the drought limiting hay stocks and forage resources in most counties, many producers are looking for alternative forage crops to help offset this shortage. The use of Brassica crops (Turnip, Rape, and Rape X Turnip hybrids) is an alternative that many producers are considering. While brassica crops are not very drought tolerant themselves, they can be planted in late summer and will be ready to graze very quickly (relative to other annual crops). Two forage brassicas species/varieties have already been tested at MSU.

It is important to stress that adequate fertility (N,P, and K) and grazing management are needed in order to extract maximum benefit from these crops. Producers need to wait until the crop has reached a certain maturity before grazing (40-60 days from planting or when the crop is about 12-20").

Introduce animals slowly with an alternative feed source (hay or old pasture). If the animals have not eaten brassicas before, then it will take a day or two for them to work out that they are good to eat. Once this occurs the animals will preferentially graze the brassicas, and care needs to be taken not to overgraze (leave 4-5" of stubble height).

Brassicas are extremely high quality so a roughage source should be fed with the crop (at least 25-30% of the diet should be hay or grass pasture). The brassicas can also be seeded with annual ryegrass and small grains, but cut the recommended seeding rates for the grasses back to 2/3. Brassicas are suitable for cattle, sheep, and goats. They are not recommend for horses.

Forage brassicas can provide additional fall grazing for cattle

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Send questions or comments about this newsletter to Jane Parish, Extension Beef Specialist, Mississippi State University Extension Service

Visit MBCIA online at http://msucares.com/livestock/beef/mbcia/

MBCIA Membership Application

Name:_____

Address:_____

City:_____

County:_____ State:_____ Zip:_____

Phone:_____ Email:_____

(Check one) Seedstock:____ Commercial:____

Cattle breed(s):_____

Completed applications and $5 annual dues payable to Mississippi BCIA should be mailed to:

Mississippi Beef Cattle Improvement Association
c/o Jane Parish, Extension Beef Specialist
Box 9815, Mississippi State, MS 39762

BCIA Management Calendar—September 2006

GENERAL

Make plans to attend the *Getting Back on Track* beef cattle short course on Wednesday, September 6, 2006 from 9:00 to 4:00 p.m. at the Forrest County Multipurpose Complex in Hattiesburg, MS. Fill out a premises identification form for your farm or ranch from the Mississippi Board of Animal Health if you have not already done so. It is not too early to determine winter supplementation needs based on forage situation. Plan winter grazing and feeding programs evaluating cool-season pasture options and by-product commodity alternatives. Watch commodity prices, and purchase supplemental feed for winter as appropriate. Take inventory of hay, and forage test each hay cutting if not already tested. Store hay to minimize storage losses and allow matching of forage test results with individual lots of hay for use in hay feeding and supplementation decisions. Graze or clip pastures closely where winter annuals will be overseeded before planting. Watch for armyworms, and plant and fertilize cool-season forages. Apply lime as needed. Keep proper free-choice minerals, adequate shade, and clean water available for cattle at all times, and check mineral and water supplies often. Remove fly tags as they become ineffective. Maintain a complete herd health program in consultation with a veterinarian including internal and external parasite control and vaccinations. Continue good production and financial record keeping.

SPRING CALVING—January, February, March

Pregnancy check herd females 60 to 90 days after the end of the breeding season and identify and cull less productive or problem cattle. Prepare for fall cattle working by determining vaccination, deworming, and implant needs and acquiring supplies ahead of time. Check and repair working facilities for weaning. Wean calves based on market and pasture conditions using weaning strategies that minimize calf stress. Monitor herd performance and nutritional status by recording weights and cow body condition scores at weaning. Implement a nutritional program to get thin cows in proper body condition before next calving. Calculate adjusted weaning weights and ratios. Identify and cull bulls that have sired calf groups that are well below the herd average for growth performance and carcass traits. Seedstock producers should send weaning records to breed associations for processing. Use weaning weights to put a heifer selection and development program in action to reach target breeding weights by the start of the next breeding season. Heifers will likely need to grow at a rate of 1 to 1.5 lbs. per day. Implement calf preconditioning, marketing, or retained ownership plans as appropriate considering seasonal price risks and breakevens on calves.

FALL CALVING—October, November, December

Prepare for fall calving separating the cow herd into calving and nutritional management groups. Cows need to be in moderately good condition prior to calving. Assemble calving supplies including calf identification tags and obstetric equipment. Move fall-calving heifers and cows close to handling facilities and observe cattle frequently. After calving, plan to move cow-calf pairs to clean pasture. Consult with a veterinarian for scheduling pre-breeding vaccination needs. Weigh yearling cattle and calculate adjusted weights and ratios. Consider the November BCIA bull sale as a source of bulls with performance information.