

In The News

What's New in Texas?

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The Ultimate Goal...Producing More with Less

On November 2, 2012, your Board of Directors met at Sexing Technologies in Navasota, Texas, to hold our board meeting. We were hosted by the nice folks at Sexing Technologies and we were given a very interesting tour of their facilities and the new Genetic Development Center. I sat down with Dr. Dustin Dean, the Director of Beef Programs, and we visited about their business and how it might help our members and other Texas Producers.

Let's recap the past 24 months. Texas just went through a 100 year drought. The state had record February and March rains and has now reverted back to water saving mode. With the nations cow herd drastically reduced because of the drought and other economic concerns, it has been an interesting time in the beef industry to say the least. With supply down and the demand for high quality beef carcasses up, this will surely drive calf pricing outlooks for this spring. The following is a summary of our conversation and Dr. Dean's perspective;

Efficiency

As most of the nation's southern beef cattle producers are getting back on their feet, many of them are taking a second look at refining their production practices to become more efficient. Yes it's true; "Efficiency" is one of those words that are thrown around in quite a few contexts. Reproductive efficiency, carcass efficiency, feed efficiency, etc., are all areas that, with a little improvement, can add big dividends to the bottom line. Still, producing animals that can do more with less is a goal all of us should aspire to.

What if you could produce calves that gained the same, or more, than your neighbor's but ate half as much grass to do it? What if you could sell a bull or replacement heifer to your commercial customers that passed on its genetic ability to eat less and gain more? With forage and water being perhaps the most important assets every Texas rancher has these days, it's safe to say that ability would be unequivocal in value.

The key component in this equation is the ability to identify, select for, and breed those types of animals. To do that, bull and replacement heifer producers must have the tools to develop those animals in a way not only to measure their group's performance, but their individual intake efficiency as well.

A New Opportunity

Ten miles south of College Station, is home to a new facility that will allow for that level of individual animal selection. The Genetic Development Center or "GDC" is a newly constructed bull and heifer development facility. Like any other gain test, producers will be able to develop and grow their bulls and heifers measuring average daily gains, yearling weight measurements, carcass ultrasound data, etc. However, the GDC facility offers a unique twist.

The GDC comes fully equipped with individual animal intake measurement equipment developed in Canada called GrowSafe Systems Ltd. currently; there are only four publicly accessible GrowSafe bull tests in the United States. The GDC is the only one in the south and is the most advanced cattle feed efficiency testing facility in the world. This system allows for dozens of animals in a single gain test pen all eating out of the same feed troughs, while still being able to measure individual intakes.

The GrowSafe system is made of individual feed troughs that are electronically activated. Upon arrival, each animal is given an electronic ID tag (EID) in its ear that has its own unique ID number but also can be electronically scanned much like a food item in a supermarket. A few times each day, feed is administered in a regular mixing truck just like any other feedyard.

The animal identification tag is read every second when an animal is feeding at the trough, load mechanisms and other sensors are sampled

continuously. In a nutshell, the system weighs how much feed is there before it eats and how much is left when it pulls its head out. Cattle can eat freely out of any trough as the system will recognize any EID that passes through it. In this way, the system will record that, for example, animal "182" ate specifically "x" amount of feed during that few seconds of consumption.

GDC Features

The length of the overall development phase can be the regular 112-day gain test or whatever the customer prefers. During that time the typical carcass ultrasound measurements, yearling weights, breeding soundness exams, etc. are performed. Within the 112-day test is a 70 day GrowSafe period, which is the required time to optimally determine differences in intake.

The GDC is designed for bi-annual gain tests aimed at developing bulls and heifers of all breeds. During one gain test, the maximum capacity is set for 640 head. So, with two tests per year the GDC can successfully develop 1280 head of bulls and replacement heifers to a saleable weight and condition while at the same time measuring individual animal efficiencies.

Another unique aspect of the GDC is its attention to detail in the areas of animal comfort and cleanliness. The bases of the pens are a mixture of bottom ash and fly ash from a local coal plant. When blended together with the soil, these materials harden up quickly to remove the cumbersome effects of boggy and muddy pens during heavy rainfall. Each pen is encompasses 12,000 sq. ft. There are 4 GrowSafe troughs per pen and each trough can handle 8 head of bulls or heifers. So with 32 head in a pen of 12,000 sq. ft, that's a spacious 375 sq. ft per animal, which is more than double your regular feedyard.

Many of you may have attended the TAA Field Day last year and got to hear Dr. Temple Grandin speak. The GDC also commissioned the famous animal behaviorist and her team to design a custom working and sorting facility. Dr. Grandin single-handedly changed the way the beef industry handles cattle. Her sorting and receiving systems are designed with animal comfort in mind and can be found in a large majority of every major feedyard in the country. The directors were very impressed with the working facilities and the ease that animals can be handled.

Dr. Dean told us that all the rations at the GDC are designed by their consulting nutritionist, Dr. Jay Branum. The rations are designed to target specific levels of average daily gain and performance in the cattle, while still delivering high quality ingredients. The GDC has the added bonus of having all rations built and formulated at their own commercial feed mill located a few miles to the south.

The Future

With the population of red blooded Americans that love their beef growing by the minute, the long term future of the beef business looks great. Still, with the growing demand comes the need for producers to become more efficient with their resources, and that includes their cattle.

It's no mystery the public wants ranchers to produce more "environmentally efficient" animals, but just as important is that rancher's ability to stay profitable. Drought, diminishing land resources and feed costs are all factors that point to the need to develop more efficient and profitable cattle.

At the end of the day, staying profitable is all about cattlemen having the right tools. With the Genetic Development Center up and running in the heart of cattle country, it just might be the right tool to help them get there. I want to encourage you to check out this state of the art facility. You can visit with Dr. Dean or any other staff member regarding your heifer or bull development goals. Dr. Dean's telephone number is 806-789-6359 and his email address is ddean@sexingtechnologies.com. I think you will find that this company is a big winner for Texas!