

BIF Honors Industry Leaders



BIF distributes continuing service, ambassador awards.



compiled by **Shauna Rose Hermel**, editor

More than 600 beef producers, academia and industry representatives were in attendance at the Beef Improvement Federation (BIF) 48th annual convention, themed “Progress on the Prairie,” June 14-17 in Manhattan, Kan. Angus Media was on hand to cover the event, which featured two and a half days of educational programming, tours visiting recent winners of the organization’s seedstock and commercial producers of the year, and the honoring of several individuals whose contributions to beef improvement efforts deserve recognition.

For full coverage of the event, visit the Newsroom and awards pages at www.bifconference.com. In August we reported winners of BIF’s Seedstock Producer of the Year, Commercial Producer of the Year and Pioneer awards. Following are some additional highlights of this year’s award presentations.

Continuing service

BIF honored four individuals with its Continuing Service Award, which it bestows on those who have made major contributions to the BIF organization by serving on the board of directors, speaking at BIF conventions, working on BIF guidelines or other behind-the-scenes activities. Those honored this year include John Pollak, Clay Center, Neb.; Alison Sunstrum, Airdrie, Alta., Canada; Alison Van Eenennaam, University of California–Davis (UC–Davis); and Stephen Kachman, University of Nebraska–Lincoln (UNL).

John Pollak was appointed as director of the U.S. Meat Animal Research Center (USMARC) in January 2010.

He received his bachelor’s degree in animal science from Cornell University and his master’s and doctoral degrees from Iowa State University. Pollak started his career in 1975 as an assistant professor in the Animal Science Department at UC–Davis.

He completed a 29-plus-year career at Cornell University, holding the rank of professor in the Animal Science Department and division leader of the animal-breeding group. He currently is an emeritus professor at Cornell University and an adjunct professor at UNL.

He was the first director of the National Beef Cattle Evaluation Consortium (NBCEC), through which he led the development of programs and projects, fostered interactions among researchers, organized multidisciplinary research teams, built coalitions with industry partners, and conducted research. Pollak led the Scientific Organizing Committee of the World Congress on Genetics as Applied to Livestock Production in planning the 2014 international meeting and has served as a member for two terms (eight years) on the international committee and as the organization’s president for one term.

Alison Sunstrum, now CEO, invested in GrowSafe Systems Ltd., in 1999. She and founder Camiel Huisma have grown GrowSafe into a global company. GrowSafe technology is improving efficiency and farm profitability, reducing the environmental effect of livestock production and providing novel insight into animal health and well-being.

Sunstrum was an early innovator in electronic data interchange/electronic commerce. She holds patents for innovative technology and has presented and published articles on electronic data interchange, precision livestock farming and early-stage technology ventures. She leads a talented team of engineers and computer and animal scientists who received the 2012 Dow Alberta Science & Technology Foundation Award for Innovation in Agricultural Sciences, the 2013 Canadian Information Technology & Communications Association Ingenious Award for Innovation, the 2014 INTEL SME Award for Innovation, and the 2015 West Virginia University Wardsville Bull Test Pioneer Award for advancing feed efficiency in the beef industry.

Alison Van Eenennaam received her bachelor’s degree from the University of Melbourne in Australia, and both a master’s degree and a doctorate from UC–Davis. A genomics and biotechnology researcher and cooperative extension specialist at UC–Davis, her extension program mission is “to provide research and education on the use of animal genomics and biotechnology in livestock production systems.” Her extension program focuses on the development of science-based educational materials, including the controversial biotechnologies of genetic engineering (GE) and cloning.

She was the lead author on the Council for the Agricultural Science and Technology 2014 report *The Potential Impacts of Mandatory Labeling for Genetically Engineered Food in the United States*. She has served on several national committees, including the USDA National Advisory Committee on Biotechnology and 21st Century Agriculture, and as a temporary voting member of the 2010 FDA Veterinary Medicine Advisory Committee meeting on the AquAdvantage salmon, the first genetically engineered animal to be evaluated for entry into the food supply.

Bill Muir, Purdue University professor of animal sciences, said, “Dr. Van Eenennaam is the single most important mover and shaker addressing a wide range of issues related to regulation and acceptance of transgenic technology. If this important technology is ever accepted in the U.S. or abroad, it will be largely due to the advocacy of Dr. Van Eenennaam using science to quell the hype of the fearmongers.”

Stephen Kachman received a bachelor’s degree in microbiology from Michigan State University and a master’s degree in animal breeding and genetics from the University of Illinois. He earned a doctorate in statistics at Montana State University and then completed



► **Alison Van Eenennaam** won the BIF Continuing Service Award.



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► **Bob Hough** (center), Lone Tree, Colo., receives the Beef Improvement Federation Ambassador Award from **Craig Bieber** (left), Leola, S.D., retiring BIF president; and **Donnell Brown**, R.A. Brown Ranch, Throckmorton, Texas.

PHOTO BY TROY SMITH



► **Alison Sunstrum** (left), GrowSafe Systems Ltd. CEO, Airdrie, Alta., Canada, receives the BIF Continuing Service Award from Bieber.

postdoctorate work at Cornell in animal breeding and genetics.

Kachman began his faculty career at the UNL in what was then the Department of Biometry. He has ascended to the rank of professor, having served as the interim chair for the statistics department for more than two years. He has authored or co-authored more than 50 peer-reviewed journal articles spanning a plethora of topics and species in both plants and animals.

Most critical to national cattle evaluation (NCE) are two contributions. The first is a proceedings paper from the 2008 BIF Genetic Prediction Workshop that first proposed the correlated trait approach for including genomic information into NCE, a method still used today by Angus Genetics Inc. (AGI). The second is a proof available online that shows the blending method of molecular breeding values (MBVs) and expected progeny differences (EPDs), a method also used today by the majority of other beef breed associations.

Kachman continues to serve the U.S. beef cattle industry by developing and applying theory that greatly enhances the NCE and by helping to train the next generation of scientists and industry breeders.

BIF ambassador

Bob Hough received the BIF Ambassador Award, given annually to a member of the media for his or her efforts in spreading the news of BIF and its principles to a larger audience.

Hough and his wife, Nancy, live near Denver, Colo., where he works as a freelance writer and an ambassador for the beef industry.

His diverse career started with his service as an extension specialist in Arizona and Maine. He joined the Red Angus Association of America (RAAA) as commercial marketing coordinator in 1994 and then was selected to lead the organization as the executive secretary/CEO from 1997 to 2007.

He assisted in the development of the first USDA process-verified program — the

RAAA's Feeder Calf Certification Program. Hough negotiated one of the first value-based marketing grids with a major packer, and he was involved in the design of the industry's first "Total Herd Reporting" program. In 2002, under his leadership, the breed released the industry's first *Reproduction Trait Sire Summary*.

In 2009, Hough moved to Denver, Colo., and served as the North American Limousin Foundation executive vice president. He has since retired from breed association work. He has written more than 300 scientific, technical and popular press articles. He wrote the book *The History of Red Angus* and co-authored the book *Breeds of Cattle*.

His contributions to the industry are many, including having served on the BIF board of directors and being one of the founding members and the first chairman of the Ultrasound Guidelines Council. He served as president of the U.S. Beef Breeds Council and on the NBCEC board of directors.



► Elected to the 2016-2017 BIF Board of Directors are (seated, from left) **Marty Ropp**, Allied Genetics Resources, Normal, Ill., president; **Donnell Brown**, R.A. Brown Ranch, Throckmorton, Texas, vice president; **Jane Parish**, Prairie, Miss., BIF executive director; **Craig Bieber**, Bieber Red Angus, Leola, S.D., past president; **Bob Weaber**, Kansas State University, BIF central region secretary; **Darrh Bullock**, University of Kentucky, BIF western region secretary; **Mark Enns**, Colorado State University, BIF eastern region secretary; **Lauren Hyde**, American Simmental Association; **Megan Rolf**, Kansas State University; **Lois Schreiner**, Kansas State University, assistant to the executive director; **Josh White**, National Cattlemen's Beef Association; (back row, from left) **Joe Epperly**, North American Limousin Foundation; **Dan Moser**, Angus Genetics Inc.; **Joe Mushrush**, Mushrush Red Angus, Elmdale, Kan.; **Lee Leachman**, Leachman Cattle of Colorado, Fort Collins, Colo.; **Matt Perrier**, Dalebanks Angus, Eureka, Kan.; **John Genho**, Eldon Farms, Woodville, Va.; **Mark Thallman**, U.S. Meat Animal Research Center; **Jared Murnin**, ORigen Beef; **Tommy Perkins**, International Brangus Breeders Association; and **David Bolduc**, Canadian Beef Breeds Council.