

# Young Producers Symposium

Inaugural event invites more young producers to attend BIF convention.

by Kasey Brown, associate editor; Nicole Lane & Raney Lovorn, editorial interns

The Beef Improvement Federation (BIF) has the legacy of standardizing scientific data and making it available for producers in an easily accessible format. Former Red Angus Association of America CEO Twig Marston covered the history of the organization at the Young Producers Symposium during the 2015 BIF Annual Convention in Biloxi, Miss., June 9-13.

In 1967 the first formal meeting of the BIF focused on the issues facing state-centered breed-improvement associations as a whole. With no standardized way of monitoring data between states or even breeds, the associations were looking to pool efforts and develop uniform guidelines for data collection and analysis, Marston

explained.

“It was a new generation,” Marston said. “It was a mix of academia and industry coming together that

made for an interesting mix when looking at their intelligence and thought processes.”

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The BIF acted with five purposes — uniformity, development, cooperation, education and confidence — that form the organization’s mission statement today.

The BIF logo, created in the early 1970s, is a reflection of those purposes and the unique group of individuals involved in the organization. Three triangles representing industry, research and extension form an eye-catching and symbolic brand.

Marston emphasized the friction that occurred when passionate people began to debate economically relevant traits in composite vs. straight-bred cattle. He referred to the 1995 conference as being a place where new ideas were heatedly debated.

An emphasis on education and adaptation has always been a part of the BIF mission, Marston says.

“BIF was formed because those people



PHOTOS BY RANEY LOVORN

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were interested in making money; they had an economic driver,” Marston says. “They wanted to build a culture based on pioneers in their field that held firmly to the belief that they should be based on facts and figures, not fads.”

— by Raney Lovorn

## Genomics from 30,000 feet

Bob Weaber of Kansas State University provided a “30,000-foot view” of current genetic technologies available to cattle producers. Weaber covered his philosophy behind using genomics in a productive cattle herd, which he compared to buying cars.

With cattle prices at all-time highs, the value of seedstock has increased, Weaber explained. When producers go to a bull sale, it’s not about buying a Chevy. It’s about buying a Cadillac.

“Which do you want in your pasture?” Weaber asked the audience.

As seedstock producers work to buy and create the Cadillac-quality animals their customers have come to expect, Weaber said, documentation of performance is required.

In addition to the importance of “documenting our product,” Weaber shared, genotype information can be used once an animal walks off the farm. He suggested genotyping females as they will have a long impact on the future of the bulls a seedstock producer markets and the steers a commercial producer sends to the consumer.

Rather than using genomics for marker-assisted marketing (using genomic data to

market the animal), Weaber recommended emphasizing marker-assisted selection, which he said is a completely different strategy.

“We can make better decisions, selections and progress in a reliable way through the use of genomic technologies,” said Weaber.

Precision is important in making genetic selections that can have exponential impact on the cattle herd. Weaber explained that increased genetic testing leads to a higher level of accuracy for expected progeny differences (EPDs), which in turn will help producers make more-accurate breeding selections for their herds.

“Accuracy is a measurement of our ability to make genetic progress,” said Weaber. “We can make more-reliable decisions and more-reliable progress from accurate information. If we make a decision based on bad information, it can inhibit genetic progress.

“Accuracy is our limiting factor, and genomic technology helps us build accuracy,” he emphasized.

Should producers be using genomics and genetic technologies in their herd? “Yes,” said Weaber, adding that his opinion only recently changed on the subject. With the



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introduction of tools like the low-density (LD) marker tests that offer greater affordability, he said, it’s a great time to adopt the technology.

Planning genetic selection for a specific environment and how they move into the value chain is very important and very complex. However, Weaber rationalized that with genomic technologies, producers can

add value to their herd while improving the accuracy of EPDs at the same time.

— by Nicole Lane

### Determining motivation in the beef genetics business

“Appreciate your opportunities and appreciate your challenges in the beef industry. To do that, you have to have a sense of humor,” says Jane Parish, research and extension professor at Mississippi State University and the new executive director of BIF. She shared an example of being frustrated with an excessively wet spring, yet recognizing the result of yet another rain was a double rainbow. The end of that rainbow was Biloxi, Miss., in June.

“The pot of gold is the knowledge we gain from this event,” she emphasized.

The beef industry is full of frustrating aspects, including working with biological beings, variant weather, equipment breakdowns and generation transfers. From her experience from many years in Extension and as a rancher, she said that motivation is what drives a person even when things go wrong. Enjoyment is a main factor, and that could be enjoyment of number crunching and using science-based information; using the newest, latest and greatest tools; attempting to produce a super animal; or enhancing the herd’s economic contribution.

She asked each attendee of the Young Producers Symposium to consider who motivates them. The beef industry is a people business, she noted. “Be willing to accept help and to offer help to others.”

Additionally, she said to consider who you are motivating. Remember that people, especially children, are watching the example you set. Learning more about the genetic tools at a younger age has its advantages, and she commended the young producers for attending the symposium.

When times get tough, how does one stay



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motivated? She shared some observations from her own experiences.

- Take risks and learn from the outcomes.
- Take time to reflect on what you have accomplished.
- Move beyond obstacles.
- Take time for other priorities by finding balance to avoid burn out.

— by Kasey Brown

### Learning from experience

The inaugural Young Producers Symposium was designed to encourage new faces to attend the convention, explained Marty Ropp, CEO of Allied Genetic Resources. Ropp moderated a panel consisting of Clint Berry, commercial marketing and seedstock procurement specialist for Allied Genetic Resources; Joe Epperly, assistant executive director for the North American Limousin Foundation; and Garrett Thomas, seedstock marketing specialist for Allied Genetic Resources.

Berry remarked on how much changes in the beef industry and how things stay the same. Opportunities and challenges will always be available, but the circumstances change. It used to be common knowledge that an off-the-farm job was necessary to be

viable in the beef industry. The opportunity now exists to make a living from ranching, but he admitted the production model has changed to do so.

Flexibility is needed to expand a beef enterprise, Berry emphasized. The No. 1 limiting factor to beef expansion, he said, is labor. That is a great opportunity for the younger generation to learn multiple things.

“There has never been a better time to be in agriculture, because there are very few people who can do it,” Berry offered. “We have to tackle opportunities with flexibility and openness our forefathers never had to face before.”

Epperly said that the wealth of new technological tools available is accelerating so quickly that it is hard to tell where they might lead. However, the challenge is to adapt the science to the ranch level appropriately. He warned that many breeders want to use a piece of a tool instead of the whole thing.

Additionally, Epperly suggested young producers need to learn to manage the gamut of data available and leverage it throughout the supply chain to answer challenges.

Thomas highlighted that opportunities in marketing are available through data management and adapting to new technology. There is no doubt that there is a great deal of money in the beef business, but more money equals more competition. Small breeders need to think outside of the box to operate as larger breeders, whether through cooperatives or just being willing to try new things.

He echoed Weaber and likened marketing a Cadillac vs. a Chevrolet. Once people get to experience the higher-quality option, they don’t want to go back, so he urged breeders to keep adding value and quality to their operations.

All panelists agreed that strong relationships are integral to succeeding in the beef business. Berry noted that BIF is a network of competitors cooperating to increase the value of the whole industry. As business gets tougher, breeders must do new things to grow. Networking is essential for growth.

— by Kasey Brown



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**Editor’s Note:** The 2015 BIF Annual Convention was hosted by Mississippi State University and the Mississippi Extension Service June 9-12 at the Beau Rivage Casino and Hotel in Biloxi. The Angus Journal and LiveAuctions.tv provide comprehensive online coverage of the event at www.BIFconference.com. Visit the Newsroom for summaries, proceedings, PowerPoints and audio of the sessions; the Awards page for announcements of award winners; and the Photos page for photo galleries of the tour.