

BUSINESS STRATEGIES

Capturing Value Of Genetics, Management

Two cow-calf producers shared their perspectives on “capturing value” for calves during a Cattlemen’s College session at the 2017 Cattle Industry Convention in Nashville. Making remarks were Richard Meadows of Alabama-based Meadows Creek Farm and Sam Hands of Kansas-based Triangle H Grain & Cattle Co.

Panelists Richard Meadows and Sam Hands share experiences in adding value to their calf crops.

Meadows shared how his family operation has grown into a seedstock and commercial entity over the past three decades by working with others and looking for opportunities to add value. What began as a small herd from 4-H show animals has now evolved into working with cooperator herds and marketing 150-170 2-year-old Angus and Charolais bulls via three annual sales.



► “It used to be said we were in the cow business. Then we called it the beef business. Then it was protein, then the grass business ... but mostly we’re in the people business,” said Richard Meadows.

Meadows credited their growth to “finding the right people” with whom to work. This has included establishing the Southeast Alabama Feeder Calf Sale, which he and a majority of his customers sell calves through as a means to offer uniform lots in greater quantities. During the years they’ve added protocols for vaccinations, preconditioning and, most recently, even offering promotion

for genetic data on calves. What began with 600 head has grown to as many as 3,500-4,000 calves being marketed through the sale on the first Thursday in August.

Of this successful marketing venue, he shared, “Especially in our part of the world we have a lot of small producers and a lot of row crops, so cattle — and marketing — have to fit in with their other enterprises.”

He also noted that the ability to bring health, feedlot and carcass information back on the calves sold helps the process come full circle for producers to improve their management and selection strategies to capture more value in the future.

Within the past few years, Meadows has begun working with Reputation Feeder Cattle for enhanced marketing opportunities. He advised other producers, “You must always be looking on the horizon to see what’s new and needed in the industry.”

Notably, Meadows underscored forging long-term relationships and commitments.

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Meadows mentioned his three young sons at home and concluded, “What we are trying to do is create a better future for them.”

Kansas producer Sam Hands, whose family operation encompasses 10,000 acres of grain farming and cow-calf, stocker and finishing programs, opened his remarks noting the lack of vertical integration that exists within the beef industry. In comparison, he pointed out that the pork and poultry industries are highly integrated and as a result have extreme predictability.

That said, Hands acknowledged, “We’ll never be as efficient as them (pork and poultry) because it takes longer to produce beef, but we still need to keep it in mind.”

He added, “There’s not the same romance in pork and poultry as there is with ranching and being a cattleman.”

Turning to the topic of capturing value, Hands stated, “As a rancher, our challenge becomes how are we going to turn this [calf] into a beef product. We’ve got to convert pounds per cow per acre and do that in the shortest time and cost possible.”

To become a market maker rather than a market taker, Hands underscored that networking and setting cattle apart through management and quality genetics becomes key.

“Pounds pay the bills in today’s rail market, but quality makes the difference,” he

said. “The bar of excellence for quality beef keeps rising.”

Hands has worked with Top Dollar Angus to aid in marketing his calves and procure premiums for their genetic superiority.



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In his closing comments he encouraged other cow-calf producers to think beyond the ranch gate.

“Who is your consumer? Who is your market?” Hands asked. “At the dinner table consumers make choices, we need to ensure when they sit down to a meal of beef, it is the best experience. We’ll never be as efficient as pork and poultry, but we need [to utilize] predictability to produce the best.”

For more about the marketing services with which each of these producers works, visit <http://reputationfeederattle.com/> or <http://www.topdollarangus.com/>.

— Story & photos by Kindra Gordon

Satisfying Hunger for Food Verification

Leann Saunders shared her perspectives on “capturing value” within the industry during a Cattlemen’s College® session in Nashville, Tenn. Saunders is president of Where Food Comes From Inc., which is a leading provider of certification and verification services to the food industry.

Saunders and her husband, John, have been working in the area of livestock identification, traceability and food industry verification for 21 years. Where Food Comes From brings together their two former companies, IMI Global and Sterling Solutions, as well as the entities of International Certification Services Inc. and Validus Validation Services LLC.

Industry partner shares perspective on capturing value of genetics and management.

Saunders prefaced her remarks by highlighting the ever-changing consumer dynamic. She noted that in 1984 consumers were focused on taste, convenience, nutrition, variety and price. Today, in 2017, they still are concerned with all of those things, but now also consider what Saunders dubs “credence attributes.” These include consideration for the environment, sustainability, animal welfare and worker care, as well as production practices.

In short, consumers want to know the story behind their food and how it got to the marketplace. As a result, Saunders explained that consumers are turning to labels and brands — and third-party verification to validate those claims — to help garner that information. This is a trend that she anticipates will continue and compound.



► Today’s consumers are concerned with the “credence attributes” of their food, says Leann Saunders of Where Food Comes From Inc. These include consideration for the environment, sustainability, animal welfare and worker care, as well as production practices.

Illustrating that, Saunders points to the proliferation of brands and various marketing claims — from natural and organic to welfare standards — now available to consumers at grocery stores. Saunders encouraged attendees to particularly look

in the dairy section and egg section at the grocery store to get a glimpse at this emerging trend.

To this, Saunders says, “Brand matters.” Additionally, she shared the value from brands citing research conducted by Midan Marketing LLC in Chicago and Shugoll Research Inc. in Maryland that revealed 84% of supermarket shoppers were willing to pay up to 5% more for branded meat, while 55% were okay with paying 20% more.

To producers who are not yet involved in verification programs, Saunders suggested source and age verification is a good starting point. Next, she reported their company is seeing increased demand for verification of vaccination and weaning protocols. On the horizon, responsible-use verification — documenting antibiotic use — is “starting to pop up,” as is non-GMO feed verification, she says.

Other verification programs include Beef Quality Assurance (BQA)/Quality Assurance Third-Party Verified, Non-Hormone Treated Beef, Verified Natural, Global Animal Partnership 5-Step Animal Welfare Rating,

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Progressive Beef, grass-fed beef and USDA Organic.

Of these many avenues available, she concluded, "As we look to the future, there's a world of opportunity. What is important to cow-calf producers is to start keeping records and document what you do. It may sound difficult at first, but it's like exercise. The first week is tough, but it gets easier."

You can learn more about the services offered through the Saunders' company at <http://wherefoodcomesfrom.com/>.

— Story & photos by Kindra Gordon

Adding Value Through Education

"Growing up as a child, I always wanted to be a farmer," said Jake Carter, president of Southern Belle Farm in McDonough, Ga. Agritourism was his way of continuing his family's farming heritage.

Three producers use agritourism to make their operations more profitable.

Carter, as well as Butch Jensen of Price, Utah, and Gary Price of Blooming Grove, Texas, educated Cattlemen's College attendees on alternative methods of income to supplement a farming or ranching business.

Southern Belle Farm

With Carter's close proximity to Atlanta, the number of questions being asked by members of the surrounding communities became "overwhelming." Instead of keeping



► Instead of closing the gates, Jake Carter and his family opened them to consumers from near-by Atlanta who were eager to learn about farming and rural life.

the gates closed, Carter opened them to consumers who were eager to learn about farming and rural life.

"This was our home, our family," he said. Instead of looking away and selling out, Southern Belle Farm was born.

Originally a dairy, the operation's transition started with a corn maze, moved into educational school tours and now offers pick-your-own strawberries, blueberries, blackberries, peaches and other produce; agricultural activities; and a country store complete with a bakery.

"It all comes down to experience," Carter says. "They come out and they experience firsthand where their food comes from. It's all about spending time with their families and building that bond."

Tavaputs Ranch

Butch and Jeanie Jensen manage the oldest family-run guest ranch and cow-calf operation in Utah. Tavaputs Ranch has been recognized for its land conservation efforts for more than a decade, receiving the Leopold Conservation Award in 2009 and the NCBA Environmental Stewardship Award for Region VI in 2010.



► Today, Tavaputs Ranch plays host to guests hoping to experience the "cowboy" way of life, as well as guided deer and elk hunts, and hiking tours, explained Butch Jensen.

Homesteaded in 1889, the ranch now encompasses more than 200,000 acres of state, private and federal land. Today, the ranch plays host to guests hoping to experience the "cowboy" way of life, as well as guided deer and elk hunts, and hiking tours.

"Firefighting is a way of life in that high country, whether they're controlled burns or wildfires," Jensen said. Often, Tavaputs hosts firemen as they fight to put out the blazes of the high desert. Last summer, the Jensens hosted 140 men for two weeks.

Jensen and his family have adapted to the changing preferences of visitors over the years, adding tours for ATV riders, business retreats and even hosting the Utah Cattlemen's Association convention.

Jensen's grandchildren are the seventh generation on the ranch, and he looks forward to seeing what they can do with it.

"That's what this is all about," he said, "the next generation."

77 Ranch

Gary Price owns and manages 77 Ranch, an Angus-cross, Brahman-influenced cow-calf operation just 50 miles south of Dallas, Texas. Seven million people inhabit the Dallas-Fort Worth metroplex, and Price recognized the value of a quiet hunting and fishing escape to urban dwellers. A cattleman by trade, Price offers bass fishing, duck hunting and hog hunting at 77 Ranch.



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Most of Price's customers are professionals who travel extensively and live in the crowded metroplex, so Price leaves them to themselves after they arrive.

"What we have is proximity to that DFW airbase. They can be down there within an hour or an hour and a half," he said. "They can even have a hunt that morning and get back to work."

In addition to their ranching and hunting enterprises, 77 Ranch works closely with the USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) to capture and release, monitor and record data on the Bobwhite quail.

77 Ranch was presented by the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department the statewide

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