

Cattle Business in Mississippi – March 2006 “Beef Production Strategies” article

A Rare Opportunity

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Every now and then there are opportunities that stand out as exceptional. The opportunity for Mississippi to host the Beef Improvement Federation (BIF) 2006 Annual Meeting next month is unprecedented. From April 18-21, 2006 the brightest and best minds in beef cattle genetics and related fields will converge on Choctaw, Mississippi to share the latest beef cattle research and industry information. The Mississippi State University Extension Service hosts beef cattle educational meetings on a regular basis, but this meeting is something particularly special.

In addition to the wealth of educational information that will be presented at BIF 2006, this meeting is an excellent opportunity to highlight what Mississippi has to offer to the beef industry. The producer tour on Friday, April 21 will spend a full day showcasing Mississippi beef cattle and forage research, seedstock cow-calf production, commercial cow-calf production, and stocker cattle production. The roundtable discussions, question and answer sessions, and social events at BIF 2006 will provide numerous settings for local producers to interact with producers, researchers, and Extension personnel from across the U.S. and even around the world.

The Evolution of Genetic Improvement Efforts

In October 2005 at the BIF Board of Directors meeting in Kansas City, Missouri, Larry Cundiff from the U.S. Meat Animal Research Center gave an extended overview of the history of the Beef Improvement Federation. Dr. Cundiff spoke of the early performance testing efforts across the country and explained how the national beef cattle genetic evaluations evolved. The Beef Improvement Federation and its member organizations including state Beef Cattle Improvement Associations were an integral part of the push to collect and evaluate beef cattle performance information. The Mississippi Beef Cattle Improvement Association (BCIA), established in 1968, is one such member organization of the Beef Improvement Federation that has emphasized performance testing programs and marketing endeavors.

Despite the much lower national cattle herd inventory than a few decades ago, today's beef producers consistently produce more product with fewer inputs. A 2004 summary by Thomas Elam and Rodney Preston of the impact of technology on beef production documented that beef production per head of cattle has increased by over 80 percent over the last 50 years. Genetic progress and improved production techniques are largely responsible for this dramatic increase in production efficiency. The tremendous strides that have been made in beef cattle genetics in all breeds are very evident today. For example, the American Hereford Association spring 2006 sire summary reveals that after 1970, weaning weight and yearling weight in the North American Hereford population increased by about 1.4 and 2.5 pounds per year through the present day.

Similarly, the American Angus Association spring 2006 sire evaluation report shows that the average adjusted Angus bull yearling weight has gone from 847 pounds in 1972 to 1,150 pounds in 2004.

Likewise requirements for the Mississippi BCIA annual fall bull sale have changed from the initial Gold Seal, Silver Seal Bull Program minimum adjusted 205-day weaning weight of 450 pounds in 1969 to the modern BCIA bull sale adjusted 205-day weaning weight requirements of either 575 pounds or 550 pounds with a 95 ratio with a minimum of five contemporaries. Twenty-four month old bulls could qualify as Mississippi BCIA Silver Seal eligible in 1969 with an actual weight of 1250 pounds or Gold Seal eligible with an actual weight of 1350 pounds. Today, bulls of this age must weigh at least 1390 pounds to be eligible for sale through Mississippi BCIA. In addition, modern Mississippi BCIA bull sale rules now require Expected Progeny Differences (EPDs) and accuracies from the respective breed associations, minimum 365-day adjusted yearling weights, and for bulls to have at least one of the following 1) Ultrasound body composition yearling scan results accepted by the respective breed association or 2) Ultrasound EPDs or 3) Carcass EPDs.

Although the rules have adapted to the changing industry, the overall objective of the Mississippi BCIA Bull Sale Program remains the same. The bull sale objective stated in 1969 was to “encourage identifying, producing, selling and using genetically superior bulls in Mississippi” and as it reads in 2006 is “to encourage production and identification of genetically superior bulls by purebred breeders and to encourage the purchase and use of these bulls by commercial producers”. It is likely that as another nearly forty years passes, genetic improvement efforts promoted by organizations like the Beef Improvement Federation and Mississippi BCIA will continue to lead improvements in beef industry production efficiency. The technologies and selection tools used will become more advanced and effective, and the Beef Improvement Federation annual meeting will continue to inform beef producers of the latest genetic improvement technologies and techniques.

The success of genetic improvement efforts is the result of breeders collecting and utilizing performance and genetic evaluation information. Beef cattle researchers continue to expand the bounds of genetic and production information, and more accurate and useful selection tools continue to be developed from these research programs. The BIF Annual Convention is the premiere event where this information is presented to the public. Mississippi producers should consider taking advantage of the BIF annual meeting being held right here at home.

BIF 2006 Countdown – Just One Month Left

There is only one month left until the Beef Improvement Federation annual meeting visits Mississippi for the first time in nearly forty years. An outstanding program is planned including the latest information on the 2005 National Beef Quality Audit, ultrasound use, feed efficiency, crossbreeding programs, retail targets, and many more topics relevant to the Mississippi beef industry. Program and registration information is available online at <http://msucares.com/livestock/beef/bif2006.html> or through your local

county Extension office. Make plans now to attend BIF 2006 on April 18-21, 2006 in Choctaw, Mississippi. **The early registration deadline is March 15, 2006.** For more information call Extension Animal and Dairy Sciences at (662) 325-7466 or 325-3691 or your local Extension office.