

Adding Value To The Cattle Farms In Southern Illinois

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The beef industry, in particular the cattle producer sector, is becoming more competitive every day. Trends show that to survive within the industry, one must differentiate their product from the commodity market, and find ways to add value to

their operation.

Survivability of this industry is also important for rural sustainability. In 2007 alone, the value of cattle and calves sold in southern Illinois was valued at \$41.3 million. Nevertheless, several opportunities exist for beef producers in Southern Illinois to make more money with their cattle while only making minor management changes. There are many potential opportunities available. For example, process verified programs, in which the producer receives premiums for documenting an animal's age and numerous other traits. More efficient cattle may also garner more money through carbon credits. Carbon credits may be earned through increasing efficiency. Practices that could increase efficiency include sustainable stocking rates, rotational grazing, creep feeding, and the use of low residual feed intake bulls. Carbon credits may also be aggregated for those producers who also own wetlands, forested land, pastureland or no-till.

These potential opportunities were highlighted at several meetings led by Dan Faulkner, professor in Animal Sciences at the

University of Illinois, Teresa L. Steckler, an Animal Systems Educator with University of Illinois Extension, and Frank Ireland, Research Animal Scientist, University of Illinois at the Dixon Springs Agricultural Center.

Their goal is to bring Southern Illinois producers together to create a cooperative. The beef producer-led cooperative would determine which programs would be made available and assist the cooperative members in garnering those extra dollars, ultimately improving rural sustainability. Several advantages for the program exist. One advantage is that the dollars are new and do not come from packers or consumers. Secondly, this program would benefit all producers, regardless of the size of their operation. Thirdly, the enrollment in the cooperative programs would be flexible; producers can choose to participate in only the programs they are interested in or those which fits their management plan.

The next step of the program is to identify those producers who wish to be the founding members of the cooperative. The founding members will first create a cooperative and then submit a Value-Added Producer Grant to the Department of Agriculture Rural Business-Cooperative Service Announcement for planning capital.

Any beef producer in southern Illinois that has questions or would like to be a founding member of the cooperative should contact Teresa Steckler at (618) 242-9310. Δ

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