

# Animal Education

## On-Farm Training Enlightens Students About All Aspects Of Raising Cattle, Crops

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### GORDONVILLE, MO.

Undergraduate research that helps students understand the aspects of raising cattle is conducted by Dr. Julie Weathers, animal science professor at Southeast Missouri State University. Her specialty is beef cattle, particularly genetics and reproduction, and she focuses on cattle at the Barton Ag Research Center.

"Some of our students are going on to graduate school, so it is extremely important that they get some hands-on research experiments," she explained. "Also, some students are just going back to the family farm or to start their own farm. They still will be people who need results and they will need to know how to run an experiment, how to see if something is going to work before they implement it full scale in their facility or farm, so we try to get as many students involved as possible."

Some of the research with the cattle focuses on reproduction. Timed Artificial Insemination is used at the Barton ARC and bulls are selected off their EPDs so they are specialized in timed AI.

"We think of our herd altogether as one and then we artificially inseminate," Weathers said. "We then bring in the clean-up bull a few weeks later, but we try to make sure that all cows calve within a pretty narrow window. Right now we are at an 80 percent calving rate within a 30-day window, so that's really good."

The program participates in the Age and Source and the Show-Me-Select cattle sales in Missouri. Age and source verified means that these animals are shipped mainly overseas, predominately to Japan. It also means that everything on this farm has been certified as originating on this farm, the lineage is verified, and the animals' feed and medicine is verified. This is guaranteed to be some of the best beef possible.

"We also participate in the Show-Me-Select Heifer Sale and that is a sale where we guarantee artificially inseminated or certified natural bred cattle that are going to go to sale for other people's replacement herds," she added. "We guarantee their genetics, when and how they should calve."

"One of the biggest things that we work on here is calving ease. Nobody wants to pull calves and that pertains to us as well. Then we also work on docility because we do have students running every single aspect of this farm. We need cattle that are going to be calm, and for lack of a better term, courteous to our students; cattle that are not going to run over students, cattle that are not going to hurt somebody. Those are the main things that we focus on here."

Nutrition research is also underway at the center. The program coordinates with performance blenders to get good cattle feed for these animals. Both grass and grain are fed here, and the cattle also have grazing pastures they rotate through.

"Dr. Indi Braden is our forage research specialist and she manages our rotational grazing," Weathers said. "We move our cattle every two to three days but we also do grain fed cattle here so that we can guarantee a good body condition score and high grading cattle. Our cattle graded about 85 percent choice last year and that's a really high percentage. We're trying to improve that every year."

Also, sweet sorghum trials are in the plans.

Dr. Wes Mueller, agronomy professor, does sweet sorghum and cattle will be fed the bagasse which is the residue after they remove the alcohol. So cattle at the center get this, as opposed to just a wheat straw, and that works as a filler compound in the feeds.

"We also work in conjunction with other departments at Southeast Missouri State University," she explained. "The chemistry department probably is going to do a research trial here this next year on ketamine and it's suspects in cattle. We try to work in conjunction with everybody as they want to do different projects. We like to get our students involved and keep them motivated and going."

This is a fully functional working farm and the students get involved in every aspect of it so when they get a job, be it at a farm, at a bank or at a company like ADM, if somebody comes in and they want to talk about any aspect of cattle or crops, these students will have done it and know how it works and have an educated opinion about it. Δ

*BETTY VALLE GEGG-NAEGER: Senior Staff Writer, MidAmerica Farmer Grower*



**Giving students important hands-on research experiments is Dr. Julie Weathers, animal science professor at Southeast Missouri State University state. Dr. Weathers specialty is genetics and reproduction on cattle at the Barton Ag Research Center.**



**Pictured with Dr. Julie Weathers (center) are two students Dennis Kinkead and Lora Tindall.**

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