

Extension Boosting Kentucky Beef Industry

One Farm At A Time

LAWRENCEBURG, KY.

For several years, Mike Wilson has been a beef producer on the side. Spending evenings and weekends on his Anderson County farm and days at his job at the auto repair garage he owns, has kept Wilson very busy. But thanks to education through the Master Cattleman program a one-on-one Kentucky Cooperative Extension partnership, Wilson may be on the way to being a full-time cattleman.

Wilson is in the fifth year of a management and genetics improvement program. He's been working with University of Kentucky College of Agriculture beef specialist Les Anderson and Tommy Yankey, the UK extension agent for agriculture and natural resources in Anderson County.

"I have had the farm since 1999," said Wilson, who grew up on a dairy farm and has been around cattle all his life. "I worked for several years to clean it up and then started to bring cattle out here in about 2005. I knew the cows were pretty good size when I bought them. I had mostly Simmental and I wanted to cross breed with Angus."

"When we began working with Mike a few years ago, he had a very typical commercial cow-calf operation," Anderson said. "He had fairly decent control over this herd with a calving season of about 70 to 90 days. He had a lot of variation in the type and size of his cattle. We wanted to help him make things tighter and more efficient."

They went to work with Mike to downsize his herd, not in number, but in physical size of each cow and allow him to wrap up the calving season in a shorter window. Through the use of artificial insemination and estrus synchronization, the team helped Wilson do both.

In just five years, Wilson has been able to reduce the frame size of his cowherd, which means he has lower feed costs, but at the same time, he's seen weaning weights substantially increase by about 100 pounds per calf. That means more money in his pocket.

"I'm now finished with the majority of the calving season in about a seven-day window," Wilson said. "This program is a great way to go; the calves are about the same size."

Yankey said Wilson has also benefitted from some of the Phase I settlement funds in Anderson County which have allowed him to purchase scales and handling equipment to keep up with the progress of the herd.

Anderson said components of the program began nearly seven years ago with funding from the Kentucky Agricultural Development Board filtered through the Master Cattleman and Advanced Master Cattleman programs offered throughout the state.

"We really wanted to attack the benefits of AI and estrus synchronization," he said. "The first level was just to demonstrate the immediate impact – the increase in weaning weight that increases the value of the feeder calf and that led to the new program MAG-60, where we are able to demonstrate through a large number of cattle harvest data that we can produce a more valuable end product."

MAG-60 a new program through the Kentucky Agriculture Development Board and Kentucky Beef Network. MAG-60 stands for Management and Genetics, 60 days post weaning. They fund the cost for the semen and the technician; producers pay for synchronization medications and related labor. It ends up being about a 50-50 match.

"We work with all the AI studs in the state and agreed to just use four bulls from each group

that are genetically similar and then produce a large number of genetically superior and similar calves and market them cooperatively," Anderson said. "Our goal is to capture \$10-15 per hundred weight more. We know through studies that our cattle are worth about \$150 per head more than non-selected calves."

Yankey said he looked to Wilson to help reach other beef producers in the county. "We were looking for a good demonstration farm so we could teach other farmers some of the principals we are promoting," Yankey said. "Mike is a progressive farmer and a great joy to work with."



Tommy Yankey, Mike Wilson, Les Anderson
PHOTOS: Aimee Nielson, UK Ag. Communications



Mike Wilson on his farm in Anderson County

He is always willing to learn; we are making a difference in his livelihood.."

The program is spreading across Kentucky. Anderson said he's got about 15 cooperators in Northern Kentucky. Yankey said other producers are using the program principals, but not selling their calves through MAG-60 and are seeing similar results.

"Any producer can implement the basic principles of the program," Anderson said. "It does take a good five to 10-year commitment to really see the long-term effectiveness. With Mike, he will see even more benefits as his cows enter their most productive years (5- to 10-years old)."

Anderson explained that most of the bulls in the MAG-60 program are oriented strictly to feedlot and carcass performance. Because many producers were looking to retain the AI-sired heifers in their herds, some of the bulls in the MAG-60 program are more oriented toward maternal performance. Saving these heifers will help Mike create a better cow, he said.

Wilson's goal is to eventually spend more time on the farm and with his family. He's planning to sell the garage and only work there in the mornings so he can focus more on the cattle. With the success he's seen in just a few years, Yankey and Anderson said Wilson is well on the way to realizing his dream. Δ