

High Use Of EPDs, Little Change In Forage Use

SPRINGFIELD, MO.

Every four years since 1994, Eldon Cole a livestock specialist with University of Missouri Extension, has sent readers of his monthly "Beef Newsletter" a voluntary survey designed to gauge their interests and farm management techniques.

Since the 1994 survey, the percentage of respondents who own a computer used for the farm has nearly doubled, going from 29 percent to 55 percent. However, the rate of increase has slowed dramatically during the last four years.

"About 60 percent of the farm homes now have access to the internet. This also has not changed since the previous survey in 2003," said Cole.

In each survey taken since 1998, the percentage of farmers who prefer receiving the newsletter via email has stabilized between 20 and 25 percent.

Television for agriculture viewers has become more prominent for southwest Missouri farmers because of RFD-TV. In the 2008 survey 40 percent of respondents said they now receive RFD-TV. A follow-up question asked what shows were most often watched and the various feeder cattle and seedstock sales were the easy winner. "Cattlemen to Cattlemen," a show put together by the National Cattlemen's Beef Association, was the runner up.

On the topic of forage and pasture production, 47 percent of respondents had attended a grazing school. "Even though they've attended a school, nearly 60 percent either rotate on a two week or more basis. This percentage has changed very little since the first survey in 1994," said Cole.

Another survey question asked whether or not fescue endophyte is a problem. This question has found little change over the past 14-years according to Cole. About 15 percent in each survey say it is not a problem. Around 35 percent view it minor, while 40 percent say it is a problem, but they felt they could manage around it.

About 10 percent felt the problem was serious.

The inclusion of a warm season grass (WSG) in their pasture/hay system increased from 25 percent in 1994 to 34 percent in 2008 among those replying to the survey.

"The rate of increase in WSG seems to have slowed in the last four years. The most popular warm season grass was Bermuda followed by Caucasian bluestem," said Cole.

In 1994 about 30 percent of respondents said they had planted endophyte-free fescue to help reduce toxicity problems in their cattle. Unfortunately, the 1998 survey showed the lack of longevity of the endophyte-free variety because much less was planted.

"This may be a factor that has caused farmers to be slow in adopting the new novel endophyte fescue. This year's survey replies showed that only 13 percent have used it," said Cole.

An impressive 75 to 80 percent of the cattle producers answering the survey said they used expected progeny differences (EPD) when making breeding stock selections. This question was first asked in 2003 and it has not changed significantly in the last five years according to Cole.

Easily, the most watched EPD is calving ease or birth weight. In fact, those EPDs are used twice as much as the growth and milk traits. Marbling or intramuscular fat is making some small increase in interest.

We have attempted to determine the breed of bull used in two of our surveys, but the responses have been difficult to interpret. The Angus bull has at least doubled in popularity since the 1994 survey. Charolais, Salers, Simmental and Limousin absorbed most of the loss. Hereford usage remained the same while Gelbviehs an hybrids/crossbreeds posted an increase in the last 14 years.

"The survey helps us with our newsletter, but may not be reflective of the average cattle producer in southwest Missouri. Some of the trends seen in the responses do seem to be worth noting," said Cole. △



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