

# Improved Breeding Helps Meet Demand For High Quality Beef

COLUMBIA, MO.

**W**ith better genetics, Missouri beef producers can help supply the growing demand for high-quality beef, said a University of Missouri Extension beef specialist.

"Until just a few years ago, we didn't have the tools to change our marketing," said David Patterson, leader of the Show-Me-Select Replacement Heifer Program.

Patterson, speaking at an MU Extension meats workshop, said demand for choice and prime grades of beef is expanding, nationally and globally.

In spite of the recession, consumers continue to seek high-quality beef. At the same time, export demand, especially to the Far East, has driven meat prices higher as well.

"If China opens their markets, they will want high-quality beef," Patterson said. "With their large population, the opportunities are there."

In the U.S., suppliers have scrambled to fill expanding demand for high-quality beef. Walmart stores switched from USDA select grade to choice beef. "They are filling 30 percent of their meat case with choice quality," Patterson said.

"When the country's largest grocery store changes its buying, the market changes," Patterson said. "As a result, prices for higher grades of beef increased."

Carcasses that grade prime now sell for an extra \$24 per hundredweight when carcass premiums are added. Choice premiums have reached \$17-18 per hundred over select grade.

"As a result, premiums amount to \$150 to \$200 per animal above market price," Patterson told the farmers learning about the meat trade.

Patterson, a reproduction specialist, said more Missouri beef producers use new methods to improve the quality of genetics in their herds. That results in high-quality beef products.

Through use of artificial insemination (AI), herd owners have access to the top sires in the United States.

Patterson's research shows how to synchronize AI breeding to reduce labor and improve uniformity of calf crops. The work continues at the MU Thompson Farm, Spickard, Mo. Demonstrations were done with cooperating farmers across the state. All was part of work at the Mis-

souri Agricultural Experiment Station.

With timed AI, all cows can be appointment-bred in one morning. AI protocols for breeding both cows and heifers have been developed and are being used worldwide.

In spite of breeding advances, only 10 percent of U.S. cows are artificially inseminated. That indicates top genetics are not being used.

"The use of technology remains disappointingly low. That limits what we can do to improve our herds," Patterson said.

"Surveys show lack of time and labor are the biggest obstacles cited by herd owners," he continued. AI protocols have reduced the time needed for breeding and the number of trips through the working chute.

Technology is on the shelf, ready for use by all producers, large and small, he said.

"The veterinary community promotes the new protocols. Booster vaccinations can be given at the same time that protocols to synchronize estrus for breeding are begun in the heifers," Patterson said. This improves efficiency.

Patterson told producers that breeding protocols require attention to detail. "If you get sloppy, it will compromise your results," he added.

In the past, the use of AI breeding required extended times for checking the herd to detect cows in heat, ready to breed. That labor has been eliminated with timed AI.

With improved breeding genetics, producers can sell high-quality replacement heifers through the Show-Me-Select Heifer Program.

Show-Me-Select heifer producers found that steer mates with improved genetics also sell for more money at the feedlots.

"We can no longer aim to produce commodity beef," Patterson said. "The demand is for choice and prime. We can produce what consumers want."

"Everyone in the world can produce hamburger beef. With present trends, commodity beef will be selling at discounts."

Producers can join the Show-Me-Select Replacement Heifer Program by contacting MU Extension regional livestock specialists. Sign-up for 2012 is under way. Specialists can be reached at local extension centers. Δ



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