US Beef Academy at the Valles Caldera

by John Wenzel, Extension Veterinarian

The topic I have chosen for this month’s newsletter is to report on the activities of the US Beef Academy taking place at the Valles Caldera from July 8th - 13th, 2012. The US Beef Academy is hosted by New Mexico State University’s Department of Extension Animal Sciences and Natural Resources. The USBA evolved out of the experience gained by hosting the New Mexico Youth Ranch Management Camp also held at the Valles Caldera for the last couple of years. These programs are designed to educate youth approximately 16-20 years of age in a wide range of topics surrounding beef production and the ranching industry. The NMYRM is the introductory class where five days of instruction covering beef production, nutrition, range management, wildlife management, alternative income sources and marketing. The US Beef Academy builds on this base focusing on beef production and includes five days of intensive instruction.

Day 1 focused on meat technology, quality and yield grading and factors that affect cutability and quality of the final product produced for consumers. This day was chaired by Dr. Amy Radunz from the University of Wisconsin and assisted by presentations and assistance given by Megan Nielson from South Dakota State University Extension and Scott Howard from Colorado State University. Students were able to participate in live animal evaluation for carcass traits, carcass processing, a consumer taste panel comparing steaks with differing quality grades and cooking methods and were instructed on how management practices can influence the quality of beef. The activities for today were sponsored by the New Mexico Beef Council.

Day 2 focused on beef cattle health, welfare and low stress cattle handling. This day was co-chaired by Dr. Ron Gill from Texas AgriLife Extension and Dr. John Wenzel from New Mexico State University. Students received instruction on the Beef Quality Assurance Program, low stress cattle handling, basic immunology, vaccinology and developing vaccine protocols. Presenters included Drs. Ron Gill and Bruce Carpenter from Texas AgriLife Extension, Drs. John Wenzel and Manny Encinias from NMSU and Drs. Mike Nichols and Glenn Rogers from Pfizer Animal Health.

Day 3 focused on ways to improve beef cattle reproduction. This day was co-chaired by Drs. Manny Encinias and Bruce Carpenter, Texas AgriLife Extension. Students received instruction on reproductive function of cows and bulls, reproductive disease, technologies such as sexed semen, sexed embryos, etc., impacts of nutrition on reproduction, estrus synchronization, pregnancy diagnosis and artificial
insemination. Presenters included Dr. Dusty Abney, Beef Specialist with Cargill Animal Nutrition and Drs. Bruce Carpenter, Manny Encinias and John Wenzel.

Day 4 focused on nutrition and was co-chaired by Dr. Ted McCollum, Extension Beef Cattle Specialist with Texas AgriLife Extension and Dr. Eric Scholljegerdes from NMSU. Students were instructed on nutritional management in different segments of the beef industry, structure and function of the alimentary/digestive system, feeds and feeding and ration formulation, and concepts involved in cattle feeding. Presenters included Drs. McCollum, Scholljegerdes and Dr. Kelly Sanders, Consulting Nutritionist with Land O’ Lakes Purina.

Day 5 focused on the global picture of marketing beef in the 21st Century. This day was chaired and presented by Leann Saunders, co-founder and President of IMI Global, integrated livestock information and verification company with a world-wide clientele. Students were instructed on the global picture of beef consumption and exports, domestic consumer trends, adding value to marketed calves and current marketing options for various classes of cattle.

Eighteen students, including one from Wisconsin, one from Texas and sixteen from New Mexico spent the week immersed in the above listed topics. Most days included breakfast at 6:00 am, instruction from 7:00 am to 7:00 pm, supper, and then daily evaluations, a “quiz bowl” that invited the top performing students from the day’s instruction to compete for the “Top Hand” award, further instruction and an overview of the next day’s activity. The enthusiasm, interest and thirst for knowledge displayed by the students was observed and commented on by the presenters. Being around these young men and women was truly a pleasure and renewed our hope in the future of the beef industry.

A scholarship was donated by both Priefert Ranch Equipment and Allflex USA, Inc. which will offset some of the costs associated with tuition of the students.

A special thanks goes out to Sonja Jo Serna for all of her assistance, work and organization of the US Beef Academy.

For more information on the NM Youth Ranch Management Camp or the US Beef Academy, go to http://nmyrm.nmsu.edu or http://usba.nmsu.edu.

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