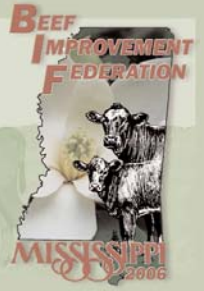




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21ST CENTURY GENETICS: RISING TO THE CHALLENGE SOUTHERN STYLE

UGC Offers Framework for Consistency

by Micky Wilson



IBBA's Loren Jackson explained the purpose of the UGC during the ultrasound symposium that kicked off the 2006 BIF annual meeting.

CHOCTAW, MISS. (April 18, 2006) — Loren Jackson presented an overview of the Ultrasound Guidelines Council (UGC) April 18, during the opening symposium of the 2006 Beef Improvement Federation (BIF) Annual Research Symposium. Jackson is director of research and program development for the International Brangus Breeders Association (IBBA) and serves on the UGC board.

While ultrasound started in the 1950s, he explained, it was in the 1980s that the technology's popularity surged. A decline in market share of beef, increasing consumer programs and increasing concentration on end products contributed to a greater demand for genetic evaluation of carcass traits.

As the idea of expanding ultrasound surfaced, so did concern for consistency in hardware, software, procedures, accuracy, technology, animal age, technician certification and data validation.

The purpose of the UGC, Jackson said, "is to develop and maintain a covered structure and protocol for annual proficiency testing and certification for technicians involved in ultrasound scanning of beef cattle for composition traits and interpreting images used in national cattle evaluation programs."

A committee consisting of four beef breed representatives, three university individuals involved directly with ultrasound technology, one active field practitioner, and three representatives from centralized ultrasound labs carry out the UGC purpose.

Responsibilities of the UGC include technician certification, protocol standards, processing ultrasound data results, financial management, and maintenance of new and enhanced hardware and software, Jackson explained. The UGC also maintains a Web site, www.aptcbeef.org, which lists certified field and lab technicians, processing labs, certification guidelines and an ultrasound study guide.

The UGC offers certification opportunities twice a year, once in the spring and once in the fall, Jackson explained. Certification includes proficiency testing and can be field certification, lab certification or both.

For field certification, applicants must pass a written exam, and have a certain percent of acceptable images and image quality showing ribeye area, rib fat and percent intramuscular fat. Standard error for prediction and repeatability, bias and correlation are also taken into consideration.

For lab certification, applicants must also pass a written exam, assess quality, and take measurements for ultrasound data reported.

"Those qualifying technicians that go out ... do a good job and certainly meet these standards," Jackson said, in closing. "I think over the year's, with the technology and the program that BIF [has developed with the] Ultrasound Guidelines Council, we've done a pretty good job of taking this technology to the next level." 