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## 21<sup>ST</sup> CENTURY GENETICS: RISING TO THE CHALLENGE SOUTHERN STYLE

# Ultrasound Made Easy

by *Shauna Rose Hermel*



Ultrasound technician Andy Meadows provided breeder tips for setting up a successful scan day.

CHOCTAW, MISS. (April 18, 2006) — There are several things producers can do to ensure a successful experience when scheduling an ultrasound appointment. Ultrasound technician Andy Meadows of Virginia shared pointers with participants of the 2006 Beef Improvement Federation Annual Research Symposium April 18.

### Schedule early

When scheduling a scan appointment, producers should consider age windows established by their breed associations, any deadlines they might have in obtaining the information, the turnaround time and technician availability.

Age windows for which the data will be accepted for inclusion in national cattle evaluations vary by breed and by sex of the animal, Meadows explained. Deadlines to consider may include advertising deadlines, sale book deadlines or even a sale day.

Meadows says the turnaround time on processing the data will vary by the technician, image-processing lab and breed association. Expect it to take two to four weeks to get your information back.

Book your date early. Technician availability will be affected by season, geographic location and travel distance. Remember, many seedstock operations calve about the same, so the demand for technicians is very seasonal.

Recordkeeping is critical, Meadows said. "If we don't have good, accurate information, it's worthless."

Meadows recommended starting the process by enrolling calves in your breed improvement program. Enrollment generally means providing the animal's birth date, birth weight, weaning weight,

and yearling weight. Yearling weight is not the same as scan weight, Meadows explained. So, don't fail to turn in a yearling weight assuming that your scan weight will suffice.

### Barnsheets

Barnsheets help ensure appropriate contemporary grouping, which is critical to making any genetic information viable, Meadows emphasized. Most breed associations provide barnsheets to their members, providing the animal ID, registration number, birth date, and sire and dam information.

Information to be filled out scan day are the scan weight, weigh date, scan date, group code, test type, scan sex and diet code. Meadows explained that the scan weight should be a shrunk weight, taken after the animals have been held off feed and water for 12 hours. And, while the sex generally agrees with the registration information, it may differ in the case of steers.

### Other tips

Other things vital to a successful scan experience include taking an inventory and cross-checking that with the barnsheets. Meadows said resolving any discrepancies before scan day will speed information return.

Check all animals for identification (ID). Technicians generally use the tag number, so it helps if that number agrees with the registration papers. It is impractical to try to read tattoos to obtain an identification on scan day.

Duplicate IDs can occur, Meadows said, with the purchase of animals or if errors were made in recording. Those have to be resolved. The animals can be differentiated by scan weight, member

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— Andy Meadows**

code, sex or breed.

Facilities also contribute to a successful scan date. The ideal power source is a power line, he said. Generators can also be used, but he discouraged the use of inverters.

Proper shelter to prevent glare on the computer screen and to shield the animals and technician from the elements will assist in the accurate collection of data, Meadows added. If you’re scanning large groups of cattle, having an area to house 30 head out of the rain will ensure the animals have time to dry before scanning.

A squeeze chute is necessary to immobilize the animal in order to get an accurate reading, Meadows said. The chute should have an adequate head catch with either a neck rope or chest support to

prevent the animal from going down on its knees. The chute should also provide access to the animal by means of drop panels or swing doors.

Meadows says safety is paramount. Consider the safety of the animal, the technician and the probe.

Tips for speeding up scan day include pre-weighing the animals and cross-checking your inventory with the barn-sheets, clipping the animals ahead of time, sorting animals ahead of time and minimizing any cattle handling stress. The more agitated the animals are, the harder it becomes to get a reading on them, he added.

If your facilities are inadequate and you have a small group, hauling your cattle to a better-equipped facility may be a good option.