

2007 Beef Improvement Federation 39th Annual Meeting

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Why Hasn't QG Improved?

Dan Moser provides a genetic improvement perspective.

Story & photo by **Troy Smith**

FORT COLLINS, COLO. (June 8, 2007) — Considering the perceived emphasis on genetic selection for carcass merit, why hasn't the U.S. beef industry seen a dramatic increase in the percentage of carcasses grading USDA Choice or better? It's a perplexing question.

The Beef Improvement Federation (BIF) explored answers June 8 at its annual meeting and research symposium in Fort Collins, Colo. Dan Moser, associate professor of animal sciences and industry at Kansas State University, advised breeders to consider four factors affecting the rate of genetic change and how they might be manipulated to hasten genetic improvement of beef quality.

Genetic variation. Moser noted how, except Angus, most breeds show a relatively flat genetic trend for marbling score for the last 20 years. Greater change would be possible, he suggested, if these breeds would aggressively develop superior meat quality lines, enabling commercial producers to emphasize quality when selecting sires for crossbreeding systems.

Selection intensity. Moser cited reasons why producers differ in the emphasis placed upon selection for improved marbling. Producer opinions vary as to the true economic reward of increased marbling. And while grid marketing does reward sellers of high-marbling cattle, retained ownership



► The feeder-cattle marketing system insufficiently values calves with superior genetic potential for quality grade, K-State's Dan Moser said during Friday's general session.

is practiced by a relatively small proportion of cow-calf producers.

Additionally, Moser said, the feeder-cattle marketing system insufficiently values calves with superior genetic potential for quality grade.

"If market signals more clearly indicated significant increases in profit associated with higher marbling scores, more intense selection would likely occur," he said.

Accuracy of selection and generation interval. Moser sees great opportunity to

enhance the rate of genetic improvement for marbling through technologies providing more accurate information on sires at an earlier age. He called ultrasound estimation of marbling score a great example, but lamented its too frequent misuse.

"One misuse of ultrasound information that limits genetic progress is the use of actual or adjusted scan data in selection and marketing, rather than EPDs," Moser stated. "Producers can make more-informed and correct selection decisions when carcass and ultrasound data are combined into a single set of EPDs, with the EPDs and accuracy values published for the carcass traits."

Moser called DNA tests another category of tools that aims to provide accurate information to aid selection early in an animal's lifetime. And while these tests have great potential for identifying certain genes associated with marbling, Moser advised producers to remember that marbling is influenced by a large number of genes.

Time. Finally, Moser urged producers to practice patience. Cattle breeding is a long-term proposition, so patience coupled with critical evaluation of technologies, old and new, should result in improved beef quality.



Look for the PowerPoint and audio file for this presentation in the newsroom. A proceedings paper is available on the "Symposium Papers" page.



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