

2007 Beef Improvement Federation 39th Annual Meeting

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Genetic Improvement: Who Benefits? Who Pays?

by Troy Smith

FORT COLLINS, COLO. (June 7, 2007) — The need for transition looms large for the seedstock industry, said Kent Andersen, executive vice president of the North American Limousin Foundation. Speaking during Wednesday's opening general session, Andersen said advancing technology and ever-expanding data collection call for an aggressive approach to genetic improvement through performance program services.

At stake, he said, are the futures of some 750,000 U.S. cow-calf producers and, ultimately, 300 million U.S. consumers.

Breed associations collectively invest \$3 billion annually to further genetic improvement, Andersen said. However, six times more money is spent on data entry than is devoted to analyses that turn data into information useful to decision-making.

The seedstock industry is coming to a crossroads, he added, and must prioritize programs that will provide their customers with further improved tools for genetic selection.

Andersen said he foresees the transfer of computation of genetic evaluation programs from the public sector to the private sector. Improved genetic evaluation services also must include increased evaluation of hybrid seedstock so all animals may be fairly compared, regardless of breed composition.

Andersen cited the need for more investment in research, development and validation of DNA diagnostics for more genetic traits. Such selection tools currently exist for marbling and tenderness, but many producers remain uncomfortable with their application. Consequently there is cause to shift from passive to assertive producer



PHOTO BY MATHEW ELLIOTT

► The Australians have calculated return on investment for genetic improvement at 28-to-1, while the Canadians estimate the ROI for genetic improvement to be 3-to-1, Kent Andersen, executive vice president of the North American Limousin Foundation, said in Thursday's opening general session.

education in the practical use of existing and new tools, including customized decision support aids that address complex interactions between genetics and management.

According to Andersen, most producers would pay at least a little more money for seedstock that are thoroughly evaluated with advanced selection tools, but breed associations must decide whether they will step up and provide needed performance programs and services. The industry, he said,

stands at the crossroads in need of leadership.

"The big question," Andersen stated, "is how do we position the BIF to better serve the industry for the next 40 years? What is our progressive vision for beef improvement?"



The PowerPoint and audio for this presentation are also available in the newsroom.



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