

# 2007 Beef Improvement Federation 39th Annual Meeting

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## Making Money with AI

Story & photo by **Troy Smith**

FORT COLLINS, COLO. (June 6, 2007) — Some commercial cow-calf producers claim artificial insemination (AI) is too expensive and best left to seedstock producers. Tim Sutphin, a commercial cattleman from Dublin, Va., disagrees.

During Wednesday evening's National Association of Animal Breeders (NAAB) Symposium, Sutphin admitted that AI may cost more. In his experience, the cost per pregnant cow is about \$6 higher, compared to natural service. However, Sutphin said the benefits of synchronized AI and retained ownership of the resulting calves far outweigh the added cost.

Sutphin and his family own a 700-head cow herd in the Blue Ridge Mountains, where they have applied synchronized AI on a whole-herd basis since 1999. All cows are inseminated on Day 1 of the breeding season, after which cleanup bulls are turned out with the cows. Retained ownership has been practiced since 1996, with backgrounded calves sent to a custom feedlot.

Among the benefits of AI, Sutphin cited a 2% improvement in pregnancy rate and more calves born early in the calving season. During the past six years, pregnancy rates have ranged from 95 to 97.5%, with 85% to 90% of calves born during the first 30 days of a 65-day calving period. The average age of all calves born is 16 days older than before

the AI program was implemented.

Sutphin credited the use of proven AI sires with high-accuracy calving ease and low-birth-weight expected progeny differences (EPDs) for reducing the number of deliveries requiring assistance. Death loss, from birth to harvest, is 2% lower for AI-sired calves than for calves resulting from natural service.


Also credited to the selection of superior AI genetics is the improved feedlot performance and carcass merit. AI-sired calves born to AI-sired cows typically exhibit the best feedlot gains, produce the highest percentage Choice or better carcasses, and return the most money. According to Sutphin, that shows how performance and profitability improves with increased AI influence.

"If we compare a calf that is AI-sired and out of an AI-sired cow with a calf that is sired by a cleanup bull and a non-AI-sired cow, the difference in the end value is \$175," said Sutphin, referring to 2006-born calves harvested in April and May of 2007.

The keys to successful use of AI in a commercial herd, he added, include selection of proven sires with balanced high-accuracy EPDs, conscientious management of synchronization and insemination procedures, and retention of the highest-quality heifers as replacements. Rather than selling calves, Sutphin believes retaining



► "It's about four weeks of misery," commercial cattleman Tim Sutphin said of his AI program during Wednesday night's NAAB symposium, "but for \$60,000 it's probably worth it." Sutphin and his wife, Cathy, operate Hillwinds Farms of Dublin, VA.

ownership through harvest offers the best opportunity to claim the added value resulting from a well-managed AI program. 

*The PowerPoint for this presentation is available in the newsroom. Visit the "Symposium Papers" page for the proceedings paper.*



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