

2007 Beef Improvement Federation 39th Annual Meeting

Coverage by Angus Productions Inc

www.bifconference.com



The Need for Verification

Verification programs support consumer confidence.

Story & photos by **Mathew Elliott**

FORT COLLINS, COLO. (June 8, 2007) — “What are Verification Programs and Why Do We Need Them?” was the title of Keith Belk’s presentation Friday during the Producer Applications Committee meeting at the Beef Improvement Federation’s (BIF’s) annual conference in Fort Collins, Colo.

The associate professor of animal science at Colorado State University broke verification down into three areas — depth, breadth and precision.

“The depth is how far your traceability goes,” Belk said. “The breadth is the amount of information that you have collected, and the precision is the degree of assurance with which a traceability system can pinpoint it. If we want to add consumer confidence to our product, we have to expand the system past the packing plant.”

But how are producers supposed to pay for this? According to Belk, consumers want this enough to pay more, but it can’t be just traceability. Adding welfare information and safety information will equate to more money.

“Most of the opportunity for growth in this category will come from outside of the United States,” Belk said, adding that exports account for 95% of potential growth if trade agreements can be fostered.

Belk then used the Japanese identification (ID) system as an example of the level of ID expected by consumers there. In Japan, all calves are given two bar-coded ear tags at calving. This ID stays with the animal all the way through to the store. At the store, producers can scan the ID on a package of beef at a kiosk to see every owner that animal ever had, who fed it, their addresses, what the animal was fed, records of visits by a veterinarian, who harvested the animal, and all dates exchanged in between.

“Brazil has lots of land and cheap labor,” Belk said. “If we want to compete, we must differentiate.”

The National Animal Identification System (NAIS) is one way that producers can differentiate, Belk said. The NAIS includes birth dates, animal ID and when and where the animal was moved. Branded beef is another option to set yourself apart.

In addition to ID, Belk advised producers to keep out or contain health issues using a combination of biosecurity and biocontainment.

“According to Cattle-Fax, in 2004 the United States lost \$165 to \$190 per head because of BSE (bovine spongiform encephalopathy),” Belk said.

Whether they choose to use a specific



► Consumers are willing to pay more for products that carry extra information — but it has to be more than just traceability, CSU’s Keith Belk told the Producer Applications Committee Friday afternoon.

verification program or just keep records, Belk advises producers to stay ahead of the curve for consumer preferences. “We need to meet consumer requests rather than consumer requirements.”



Look for the PowerPoint and audio file for this presentation in the newsroom.



Editor’s Note: This article was written under contract or by staff of Angus Productions Inc. (API), which claims copyright to this material. It may not be published or distributed without the express permission of Angus Productions Inc. (API). To request reprint permission and guidelines, contact Shauna Rose Hermel, editor, at (816) 383-5270 or shermel@angusjournal.com.