



## ..... STRAIGHT FROM THE HORSES MOUTH

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As I am writing this week's column I am in Lincoln, NE for a two day beef meeting. The first was the 2017 Beef Systems Workshop with a literal "who's who" in the beef industry. It was nice to visit and put heads together with some of the brightest and most successful minds not only in the beef industry but the agriculture industry as a whole. The focus of the workshop was framework development of a 5-year plan for the Beef Systems Initiative for Nebraska. We all know that beef is the big dog when it comes to Nebraska Agriculture and it was pleasing to me to see people come together from all walks of life and from all over the State to share their ideas, concerns and thoughts about how we can better position the beef industry and the educational, research and outreach utilizing partners like the USDA MARC and other entities across the system.

The University of Nebraska-Lincoln (UNL) is a leader in developing programs and disseminating information in beef cattle production and management. This has been a coordinated effort based on a systems approach with multidisciplinary teams comprised of scientists from UNL and the Agriculture Research Service. In January 2016, seventy-seven participants from UNL, USDA, and the beef industry throughout the state gathered at a Beef Systems Workshop to identify high priority areas for future research and educational programming in beef production systems. I was fortunate to be part of that team.

That Beef Systems Workshop identified two priority areas that we felt we needed to address in the future: 1) improving perennial grassland harvest efficiency and long-term productivity; and 2) developing integrated crop-cattle systems that secure livestock feed availability and crop productivity. For the perennial grassland systems priority area, the proposal was to identify management practices that achieve optimal harvest efficiency and utilization of grasslands using a case study approach. This plan involves a comparison of grassland and beef production systems of ranches in Nebraska that utilize various management and grazing strategies. The cattle grazing distribution, grassland production, range condition/health, alternative feed resources, and harvest efficiency of ranches in Nebraska would be quantified and key factors that impact harvest efficiency and productivity would be determined through a modeling process, which would be the basis for conducting longer-term research involving adaptive management strategies in perennial grassland systems.

For integrated crop-beef systems, the plan was to compare traditional, segregated crop and cattle production to systems that integrate grain crop and beef production and to evaluate the impact of those symbiotic systems on crop and cattle production, soil quality, and economic viability. Initially, the "traditional" cow/calf system using Smooth Bromegrass pasture and corn residue would be compared with an integrated system using corn residue and forage cover crop. Additional resources to measure the plant/animal/soil interactions within regionally diverse cropping systems at West Central Research and Extension Center at North Platte, the Panhandle Research and Education Center at Scottsbluff and USMARC near Clay Center are important to evaluate the effects of cattle on cropland and potential forage production within these different cropping systems. The data obtained from both priority areas will be used to determine economic resiliency and adaptability to changing risk scenarios. The meeting today also suggested utilizing existing ranches in which to conduct research on beef such as the Gudmundson Ranch (the former Rafter C Ranch in Grant, Hooker and Cherry County) which was gifted to UNL as well as the Barta Brothers Ranch located in Rock and Brown Counties south of Long Pine, this too was gifted to UNL.

With the current funding climate, there essentially are no external funding opportunities for maintaining long-term projects designed to answer questions critical to beef systems and to deliver relevant information needed for continued success of the beef industry, thus researchers and educators will be looking for collaborators including: farmers, ranchers, industry businesses, commodity groups, etc. in order to conduct these studies. As federal funding continues to move toward transdisciplinary-team approaches, we find it beneficial to have a mechanism that demonstrates collaboration across disciplines and industry segments in place. This will be helped with what I think will be a valuable tool in the future.

The creation of a Center for Beef Systems would serve to support the efforts of faculty and staff working in beef cattle systems by improving coordination, communication, and recognition as well as the public. This center would be a collaborative and inclusive entity and serve as the platform to improve collaboration and effectiveness of the three Land-Grant missions across the various disciplines working in beef production systems. I am excited about this opportunity for beef in Nebraska and hope our economy can turn around so we can do the exciting things that came up at today's forum.

The second meeting was on Friday and included discussion on the proposed Center for Beef Systems, plans for the new Eastern Nebraska Research Education Center (ENREC) which is located at the ARDC near Mead, NE. We also went over new and needed cow-calf systems research with reports on the Gudmundson Ranch as well as Grazing systems research plans at Barta Brothers Ranch. It is amazing what things are being done and the ideas that were suggested. We also had the chance to do Q&A on beef cow-calf systems research: marketing issues for cattle: Residue energy values and ethanol byproducts TDN. Another interesting part of the day was learning about Animal Science Graduate students projects on all the research projects that are going on, not only in Lincoln but at the sites across the state as I highlighted earlier. I can tell you this, I have lots of new information to put in future newsletters. But if you can't wait, I suggest going to <http://beef.unl.edu/>. Just remember that Nebraska is indeed the Beef State and there are people who are trying to make it even better!

**The preceding information comes from the research and personal observations of the writer, which may or may not reflect the views of UNL or Nebraska Extension. For more further information on these or other topics contact D. A. Lienemann, Nebraska Extension Educator for Webster County in Red Cloud, (402) 746-3417 or email: [dlienemann2@unl.edu](mailto:dlienemann2@unl.edu) or on the web at: <http://extension.unl.edu/statewide/webster>**