THE CALENDAR
January and February are very busy meeting times. Upcoming on January 20 is the Barry County Soils and Crops Conference. I know this could be very short notice but could serve as a last minute reminder. The conference will be at the First Christian Church, Cassville on Old Exeter Road. Start time is 6 pm with supper. At 7 pm we’ll hear from Justin Sexten, University of Missouri Extension beef nutrition specialist. His topic is how to add value to the calf crop. Another U of MO speaker is Brent Myers who’ll discuss wheat growth. Completing the evening is regional extension ag business specialist Wesley Tucker. His topic is farm succession planning.

At this time I plan to have a Show-Me-Select meeting probably on February 16 at my office in Mt. Vernon. All the pieces aren’t in place yet so watch for meeting notices in the mass media.

The last two events are the Livestock Forage Conference in Stone and Taney counties. Stone’s date is February 16 and Taney’s is February 23 at the high school in Forsyth.

WEATHER OUTLOOK
Last winter was pretty tough with snow and cold weather. This could have prompted some of you to delay bull turnout or AI service so your cows would calve in March and April. That caused me to send a message to our state extension climatologist, Pat Guinan to see what his crystal ball weather forecast was for 2015 calving season.

Pat’s reply on March 17 went something like this. Overall, February temperature trends across southwestern Missouri over the past 25 years have been mild. Since 1990 there have only been 9 Februarys (36%) with below normal temperatures and two were especially cold, 2010 and 2014. Similarly, southwestern Missouri winter temperature trends (Dec-Jan-Feb) in the past generation have been mostly benign. Only 7 of the past 25 winters have been colder than normal with only 3 being notably cold; 2000-01, 2009-10 and 2013-14.

Speculating what my happen during the winter of 2014-15 is a limb I won’t go out on. Year to year variability can be extreme. Of course, I didn’t expect him to be specific but I appreciated his reply. So far we’ve had some cold days, but they’ haven’t persisted and snow and ice have been minimal. By the way, I’m writing this on January 12th.

I imagine most of you may work a little harder this winter to save calves from dying since they are worth $1400 or $1500 come fall. Some of the hay in bale yards looks like it’s highest and best use if for bedding, so use it to keep newborns more comfortable in snowy, wet conditions.

WHAT? REPLY
Well, here’s the reply you’ve all been waiting for since last months item about cud chewing. If the cows were born under a Republican administration they chew from right to left. If born under a Democratic administration, they chew from left to right. Or, if their owners are NPR fans, they learn to chew from left to right. If they are Fox News fans, right to left.

The above comments came from an economist and he said, “take your pick.” He dared me to find research that contradicts his null hypothesis.

I had a local cattleman say his cows weren’t chewing their cud. I told him he might need to resort to some of the “old wives tales” about cows losing their cuds and the weird ways you were supposed to get them ruminating again.

MISSOURI BEEF SUMMIT
Chances are by now you’ve read or heard something about the Missouri Beef Summit held in Columbia on January 5. Governor Nixon spoke at the beginning and stated that we have an opportunity to increase the added value to the Missouri cattle industry.

Following his introductory remarks, about 30 speakers from across the beef industry and the state gave short comments they believed were opportunities to enhance added value to beef cattle. Even the dairy industry got in
the act as dairy contributes a lot of beef in the form of Holstein steers and cull cows.

The Governor said high quality sustainable beef is the goal. He indicated we need to finish more cattle in Missouri. In fact, a visual stressed, Finish, Harvest, Brand Missouri Cattle as a goal.

I won’t detail comments from all the speakers but I’ll try to highlight a few of my starred items. Keep in mind the charge to the panelists was to address ways to add value to Missouri cattle.

- Scott Brown, MU ag economist said we can expand our current pasture carrying capacity but keep in mind prices won’t stay as they are now always. He encouraged the use of better genetics to create value.
- Ron Plain, MU ag economist felt the most profitable use of Missouri’s grass is with cows and raising the best calf possible.
- Jeff Case with Rabo Agri Finance said Missouri is the number one state so far as quality beef is concerned and we need to capitalize on that niche.
- David Janish, FCS pointed to risk management as a critical practice in the future. Missouri is a cow-calf and backgrounding state and we should build on our strengths.
- John Woods, US Wellness Meats has been involved in forage-fed beef since 2000. He’s been involved in the feasibility study and said a new plant would require 1650 head per day, 5 days a week to make a go of it. To do this would require a captive supply to keep the pipeline full.
- David Holloway, JBS USA Beef pointed out that the industry is now over-built by 20-25%. He added that Missouri would need a committed supply and be willing to take risks.
- Monty Kerley, MU beef nutrition professor spoke about the technology that is available from nutrition and genetics that more producers need to be employing in order to add more pounds economically.
- Mike Kasten – Quality Beef by the Numbers director agreed with others that genetic and reproductive technology coupled with records will be required to find the top cattle and feed them to their genetic potential.
- Justin Sexten, state extension beef nutrition specialist focused on improving our forage utilization as marginal row crop land is put back to forage production. Novel endophyte fescue and sensible supplementation can help attain more production from those acres.

- Jerry Taylor, MU professor of genetics referred to an earlier comment about growing the pie via genetic improvement and genomic selection to identify cattle outcome potential. In time this could even be done at birth. He also made a valid point that not every beef cow owner in Missouri is motivated by profit.
- Justin Angell, producer and MO Valley Commission Co. said whatever comes about from this summit, don’t forget the 40-cow herd owner. He felt we have a lot of waste acreage in the state that should and could be reclaimed for beef production. Cost-share for fencing might be a starting point.
- Jim McCann past president of the Missouri Cattlemen’s Association commented about the value of the dialogue taking place today and urged everyone to work with their commodity organizations to derive the real benefits from the summit.
- Nick Hammett, Circle A Ranch stated that Missouri knows how to do cow-calf so we need to start with improvements in pasture via clearimg land and using management intensive grazing to better utilize that resource.
- Mike John, John Ranch Inc. was agreeable that we need to be doing more to improve the genetics of our state’s cattle. He voiced concern over generation transfer and hoped government wouldn’t hinder it.
- Glen Cope, Chairman of the Beef Industry Council praised MU extension for their help in technology transfer from the research lab to the farm. Reaching the consumers is vital and that will require more funding to the commodity groups to keep consumers buying beef.
- Bob Thompson, seedstock producer wondered how to get farmers an incentive for buying quality genetics.
- Allen Wessler, MFA, Inc. thanked MU educational programs for all their help and asked if incentive programs like Kentucky and Tennessee have implemented to improve beef production in their states would help. He concluded, “in the future we must think globally but react locally.”
- Blake Hurst, Missouri Farm Bureau president questioned whether beef slaughtering was our niche and maybe better genetics is where the profit margin is more attractive. He concluded, “be careful about comments about your niche and don’t criticize what your competition is doing.”

The Summit turned out better than most expected. We’ll see where it takes us. What do you think University of Missouri Extension can do to help capture more economic value from our beef cows in the state?