BULL SALE TIME
The 87th sale of performance evaluated bulls will be March 28, 7 pm at the Springfield Livestock Marketing Center. Forty-seven bulls were consigned by members of the Southwest Missouri Beef Cattle Improvement Association.

We'll have a 30-minute Q & A about using numbers and technology when buying bulls beginning at 5:30 in the sale ring. Our emphasis for several years has been on trying to get cattle producers to gather objective data about their cows. Once you get a good data base it makes choosing a bull or semen if you use AI a lot easier.

If you just use your visual judgement you may pick the right one occasionally but remember there’s a lot of average bulls out there. Use the breed percentile rank tables to size up where your bull choices rank before you raise your hand or nod your head. If your gut tells you that your herd needs more growth, don’t fall in love with a bull that’s in the 70th percentile rank for yearling weight. His calves likely will end up as below average and your check after you sell them will reflect the bull’s poor genetics for growth.

I’ve run the average yearling weight expected progeny difference (EPD) for the 47 bull’s percentile rank and it’s just under the 20th percentile. That simply means for yearling growth the average of the bulls rank in the top 20%. Some were in the top 1% and the lowest was 75%.

You may not need bulls from the top 1% if your herd has data showing your growth rate is compatible with your farm or ranch’s goals. When you plan to attend a sale, do so with a purpose other than just buying a bull. After you make your selection in the book, look the prospects over starting from the ground up.

Bulls in the sale have all met certain EPD percentile ranks that should allow them to have a friend or two when the bidding starts on the 28th. If you have “number” questions before the sale please call your extension livestock specialist.

STEER FEEDOUT
In the above item I encouraged herd owners to develop a “data base” for strengths and weaknesses in their cow herd. A good place to start is by putting 5 or more steers in our Missouri Steer Feedout. We’re now accepting entries until May 10 for steers born after July 1, 2015. They will be sent to an Iowa feedlot on June 7. This event gives you a better idea about your herd’s genetics for post-weaning growth and carcass merit. Entry forms and regulations may be found online at www.swmobcia.com.

SPRING TURN-OUT TUNE UP
The Extension Service down at Bentonville, Arkansas has an educational meeting set for April 1 at 2 pm. The location is the Fairgrounds, 7640 SW Regional Airport Blvd. Topics include: horn fly control; springtime vaccinations; mineral supplements; fescue and animal performance; 300 days of grazing and tips for baleage and silage. The latter topic will be covered by our own Tim Schnakenberg, agronomy specialist from Galena. The program ends at 6 pm. Sounds like a good way to learn on April Fool’s Day.

SOUTHWEST CENTER GRAZING SCHOOL
When I think of the top-10 highly educational programs that I’ve worked with in my extension career, the grazing schools are right there. Our Southwest Center, Mt. Vernon School is set for May 10, 11 and 12. The sessions start at 8:30 am each day and run until about 4 or 4:30. We need registration by April 29.

Whether you’re a native of this part of Missouri or you just moved here from another state, you’ll learn a lot. Much of what you’ll learn may not even be from the Extension and NRCS speakers. There is a tour of 3 or so farms that use management intensive grazing. Your classmates will also add to your knowledge of grazing management.

The cost is $140 per person which includes the noon meals, two grazing manuals and a fancy yard stick we call the grazing stick. Registration forms are on our website at http://extension.missouri.edu/lawrence.
A DEAL FOR YOU
Every now and then I have a “deal” that may interest some of you. It’s part of a research project overseen by our state beef genetics specialist, Jared Decker. He’s looking for herds of beef cows, spring or fall calvers. The project is designed to be a 3-year one. Purebred, major breed, registered herds are preferred but it’s not exclusive to them.

The first year a DNA sample is taken, either tail switch hair or blood. Data needed is breed or cross, age of the female, her sire (registration number if known) and a 1 to 5 hair score is placed on her by an extension specialist. The data is gathered in May or June.

Herds may be any size and progeny data such as weaning weight is good but not necessary. Brahman influenced herds may be able to be analyzed for complete genomic profile if 500 head or more are enrolled.

The second and third year hair scores are obtained along with the dam’s tag, brand or tattoo. No hair or blood is required at that time. If the female is registered you’ll receive a complete genomic profile from the breed association. There is no cost to you.

Please let me know if you’d be interested in participating before you work your cows in May or June. Samples are submitted before July 15 this year. Yes, producers can collect samples themselves. We can get you blood or hair cards. I hope some of you will help Jared out on this interesting trial.

GMO RESEARCH
Genetically modified organisms (GMOs) were discussed at the NCBA Convention & Trade Show Cattlemen’s College earlier this year. The speaker was Alison Van Eenennaam, extension specialist from the University of California, Davis. Some of you likely saw the report in the Angus Beef Bulletin. Alison said, “I really hate the term genetically modified organism, it’s really an ill-defined term.” The following are points I found helpful to clear the air.

She pointed out that since the genetically engineered crops appeared in 1996 there have been no safety issues related to animal or human consumption of feed or food ingredients from genetically engineered crops. Hundreds of studies have been conducted and published to prove the safety of those crop varieties for animal consumption. She further stated that GMO plants are nutritionally equivalent to non-GMO counterparts.

Alison and colleagues have looked at performance of about 400 million beef cattle between 2000 and 2011 and found no change in the positive production trends after GMO crops were introduced. She adds that products from animals fed genetically engineered crops are indistinguishable from those produced by animals fed non-GMO feeds.

If you’d like more details on Alison’s talk, check out the coverage in the Angus Beef Bulletin by Shelby Mettlen at www.4cattlemen.com.

MORE ON WASTE PLASTIC
Earlier this month at the Spring Forage Conference and our Southwest Missouri Cattlemen’s meeting I conducted a survey regarding how farmers dispose of waste net wrap and other plastics used in preserving forage crops. It was not scientific, I just asked a few over 100 persons how they get rid of it.

The combined results for the survey showed that 60% burn it. Some had ingenious methods of burning such as in their outside wood furnaces and around old stumps. 31% used a dumpster and it ended up in the landfill. The other methods were: erosion control in ditches; put in truck and deposit along the road; local recycling center; a couple mentioned some of it ends up in Lake Pomme De Terre. They quickly said they did not contribute to that.

The most unusual use given was from one woman who said her neighbor had 65 cats and the net wrap made excellent cat nests. Many of the respondents asked, “how are we supposed to dispose of it?” That remains an unanswered question. One suggestion was to visit with Europeans as they’ve used plastic a long time and may have an answer. We’ve also found that places in Canada will recycle it. Everyone agrees we need to do something as it is a problem and burning and landfills are not good methods.

JOB OPPORTUNITY
My hometown newspaper from Potosi, Missouri has a “years ago” column. Last week an item from 1916 read: Wanted: Man past 30 with horse and buggy, to sell Stock Condition Powder in Washington County. Salary $70 a month. Contact 9 Industrial Building, Indianapolis, Indiana. I wonder if the “powder” would prevent fescue toxicosis? Maybe I should add it to my list of fescue cures which is now up to 118. In 1916 they’d never heard of fescue as it came along in the 20’s and 30’s.