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LASAGNA, NO THANKS

On Christmas Eve, most of my family were gathered at our home in Mt. Vernon. Following church service, we were lined up getting plates filled with our traditional beef lasagna, etc. I was one of the last to go through the line. After getting my plate filled, I took 4 or 5 steps out of the kitchen and collapsed. My son-in-law Jason, immediately began applying resuscitation tactics. He knew what he was doing as he's employed in Columbia on the Missouri Taskforce One Team. Other family members were on the phone, calling 911 and the Mt. Vernon Emergency crew. Son-in-law Randy assured me he was helping hold my head.

The EMT's arrived in 5 minutes and began working on me with their equipment. Apparently, I "coded" and they and Jason brought me back. I have no memories of any of this, not even the helicopter ride to Mercy Hospital in Springfield. Two weeks in the hospital, surgery, lots of meds and now I'm home. I hope to be back on the job soon.

Thanks so very much to all of you for your thoughts and prayers for me and Charlotte who suffered a stroke on November 10. I'll pass on the lasagna in the future. Actually, I never even had a bite of it.

MONETT CONFERENCE

We're sending along the complete agenda for this year's Monett Beef Conference. Each topic should be of interest to most of you. There's always debate over how much it costs to keep a beef cow around for 365 days. We've asked three good producers to share their cost figures as they vary in size of cow herd, years in business, etc. State beef and dairy specialist, Joe Horner will moderate this panel and share some cost and price outlook info.

Dr. Bryon Wiegand, Columbia will answer a lot of your questions about meat substitutes. A panel of local veterinarians will discuss the number of health issues in their clientele's herds. They'll also address some of the pre-con programs regarding cost and whether they yield a premium when they sell calves.

Closing out the program an attorney and accountant will give landowners tips on succession planning for their farms.

This is one of the best conferences I work with each year and you won't be disappointed with this year's offering. A bonus for attendees is the chili supper put together by the Southwest Missouri Cattlemen's Association.

BULL SALE CONSIGNMENTS

Do you run a small to medium sized purebred beef herd? If you do and you reside in the southwest corner of Missouri you might be interested in consigning bulls to our Southwest Missouri Beef Cattle Improvement Association's upcoming performance tested bull sale.

This sale began in 1973 and is held the last Monday evening in March and October. True to the name, bulls must meet several performance criteria to be eligible for entry. First of all, there is a geographic requirement. Consignors must be from counties running from Vernon across to Laclede then south to Texas and Howell counties.

Consignments for the March sale must have been born between May 1, 2018 and February 28, 2019. Over the years, the sales have established a solid buyer clientele of folks who embrace performance data. When the sales began buyers looked for bulls with frame and high adjusted yearling weight. When EPD's arrived, along with indexes those buyers used that objective data to make purchases.

Over the 90-plus sales it's encouraging to see top commercial buyers utilize data and breeder reputations to claim top prospects with their final bid. I'll admit there are bull sales that have higher average prices but for now breeders that want to break into the seedstock business and make a name for themselves this is a low cost opportunity. Whether you're a veteran breeder or a newcomer this sale is performance oriented and not a "dumping ground" sale.

The Angus breed dominates consignments but other breeds have been in the drivers seat, especially Polled Herefords, Charolais, Simmental and Brahman influenced bulls.

The requirements are strict but fit nicely for the commercial producers needs. A bull must have a genomic profile at entry time. Bulls must be in the 50th percentile or better for at least three of these six EPDs: calving ease, weaning weight, yearling weight, milk, marbling or rib-eye area. They must have at least an 1100 lb. adjusted weight and at least a 5 frame score at 365 days.

Breeds other than Angus are encouraged to enter but they need to have more than just one or two in the sale in order to attract potential buyers.

If you're interested, the deadline for the March sale is January 30. Contact sale manager Phoebe S. Wiles, 1220 West Main Street, West Plains, MO 65775 or call 417-293-8002. Your nearest Extension field specialist in livestock can also answer many of your questions.

CUTTING HEIGHTS

Is your fescue stand getting a little sparse? I've heard quite a few folks indicate their stands weren't as thick as they once were. If you have an old Kentucky 31 stand this can be a good thing unless you're taking a seed crop off of it. A thinning Ky31 stand might be an ideal situation to interseed with a legume in the next month or so.

Now, back to a possible reason for the thinning stand. The long-time cutting height recommendation is 4 inches for cool season grasses like fescue, orchardgrass and brome. Disc mowers are possible culprits as they allow you to get closer to the ground than you could with a sickle bar mower. Getting below the 4 inch mark may add some tonnage to that cutting but if done consistently you'll thin your stand. Essentially, it's the same principle that happens when you overstock your pastures with cattle and graze it too hard.

CHECKING PASTURE STANDS

Matt Poore, North Carolina State Extension ruminant nutrition specialist wrote an article recently that you might be interested in if you're a detail person when it comes to determine what percentage of good and bad plants are in your pastures or hay meadows.

Matt suggests using the "point step" method. It involves a clipboard with a paper record that lists possible good and not so good plants you have in a field. He says you randomly walk the pasture as if you were collecting a soil sample. Take 20 to 30 steps, look down at your shoe toe and record on the sheet what plant your shoe tip touches or it could be bare ground. Of course you do need to have a good idea of what different plants, both good and bad, are in the field. Within a field try to gather between 100 and 200

shoe tip points. This could be an humbling exercise and could help you decide if you need to renovate some pastures. Herbicide treatment might also be in order.

BULL SHOPPING IN THE 20'S

I've already touched on some of the approaches producers use to select bulls that fit their operation if they attend the various tested bull sales that will flood your mailbox or computer in the next couple of months. For years, I feel EPDs lead the way if you have sufficient knowledge of the genetic makeup of your cows or of the bulls you've used the last 3 to 5 years.

EPDs may be a bit overwhelming to some who aren't math oriented. In which case, I just tell them to look at percentile rank of your prospective bulls within a breed.

I read recently about a program several noted beef genetic folks are teaming up on. It's called iGenDec which stand for internet genetic decisions. This is a web-based decision support that aims to help beef cattle producers make more profitable genetic selection decisions via the integration of farm-level economic data and average performance information. Now, that's a mouthful but bear with the researchers as I have faith in them.

Here's an example, much simplified, where the producer inputs information about their own herds such as breed makeup, whether replacements are kept, when are calves marketed and possibly other phenotype herd information. Why they probably will include whether the cows will graze hot or novel fescue or some other management practice.

After the information is placed in the computer program iGenDec will give a ranking of bulls based on net profit differences accounting for heterosis and ability to compare across breeds. They state it's like creating a customized selection index for your own herd. It probably will be unveiled in 2020.

It seems like a logical approach to simplify a rather complicated sire selection process. I really liked the way the article gave a most simplistic example of how basic the program could work. For example, "I've got black cows running in southeast Kansas." Watch for details.

FESCUE RENOVATION

The alliance for Grassland Renewal, otherwise known as toxic tall fescue renovation schools will again be held at the University's Southwest Research Center, Mt. Vernon on March 25. Call me or the Southwest Center for details. It will be a day-long program. The SW Center's phone is 417-466-2148.