Partnerships Create Value

Continuing education for veterinarians helps producers improve their bottom line.

*by **Nicole Lane,** Certified Angus Beef LLC*

35 Keys to Success
Continuing Education

As a retired small-animal Army veterinarian, Dale Williamson wasn't comfortable fielding questions about expected progeny differences (EPDs) and genetic testing for cattle. Those questions kept coming his way, even though he didn't know how to read bull data, let alone give advice on selection.

That all changed after attending the large-animal session at the Kansas State University (K-State) Annual Conference for Veterinarians in early June. The seminar qualifies for continuing education credits for all who wish to maintain their license to practice.

The large-animal track featured genomic opportunities in the cattle industry and included presentations by Bob Weaber, cow-calf extension specialist at K-State; Tonya Amen, genetic services director for the American Angus Association and Angus Genetics Inc. (AGI); and Randall Spare, Ashland, Kan., veterinarian. Certified Angus Beef LLC (CAB) sponsored the session.

After years of working as a veterinarian and helping manage feedlots, Ran Smith, Tribune, Kan., saw immense value in the information shared.

"The more aggressive you are at being familiar with new information, the more successful you will be as a practicing vet," he said.

Comprehensive herd health strategies are not easy to execute. Health programs and targeted selection can take lots of recordkeeping, analysis and moving parts. Adding constantly changing technology to the mix can really complicate herd management. As genetic testing and data-driven marketing expand in the cattle industry, producers need an educated and trusted resource to consult. Many turn to their veterinarians.

"We are becoming more and more consultants, as well as practitioners," said Williamson of Manhattan, Kan.

►**Above:** K-State animal scientist Bob Weaber shares insight into genetic selection, EPDs and how they are calculated.

►**Below:** Event attendees visit with vendors about products for veterinary clients.

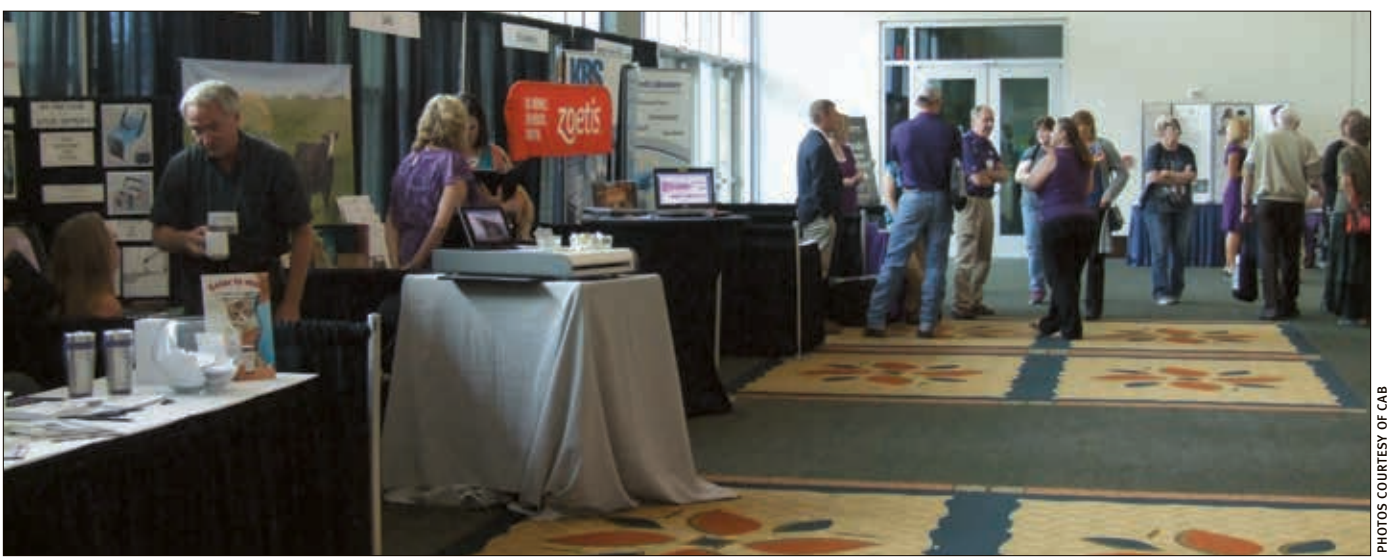
Genetic investments

In an effort to reach premium-quality beef, many producers invest in genetics. Amen said veterinarians play a role in helping producers decide which genomic strategies fit their needs; they can also coordinate collection of DNA samples and communicate the importance of correlating performance data.

"What we are trying to do is give tools that will make us more efficient and more accurate in our genetic selection and mating decisions at the seedstock level and at the commercial level," Amen said. "Then we can improve the genetics and become more efficient in producing high-quality, nutritious beef to an expanding global market with our shrinking cow population."

In the cattle industry, genomic technology can determine parentage, carriers of genetic conditions and performance traits for selection, among other uses.

That information can come from such



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tests as the Zoetis High-Density 50K or the GeneSeek Genomic Profiler (GGP-HD) test. These tests combine the effects of more than 50,000 genetic markers to calculate a molecular breeding value, which is then incorporated into EPDs much the same as traditional performance measures. Quickly adopted by producers across the Angus breed, the genomic tests have led to more-accurate EPDs and opened the door for genetic-marker-based marketing.

"Genomics is extremely, extremely valuable, especially in those lowly proven animals," Amen said.

Not just for seedstock producers

Genetic testing has taken off for several commercial producers with the release of GeneMax™ (GMX) by Zoetis in partnership with CAB and AGI. These lower-density tests with fewer markers are more economically feasible for the commercial producer.

"Today, the cost of powerful genomic tests has become economical enough that it is now feasible for commercial producers to implement the technology in their operations," Amen said. "Even by just finding and eliminating genetic outliers on the bottom end of the herd, significant progress can be made."

By also using bulls with higher-accuracy, genomically enhanced EPDs (GE-EPDs), the rate of genetic improvement can be increased even more.

The partnership between veterinarian and producer presents the opportunity to improve genetics and, in turn, beef quality. Spare said it's all about asking questions and creating value for his clients. Communication about herd goals, tools and technology, and what services the veterinarian can offer is important.

"When you create value, you generate a product that someone is willing to pay market price or greater for," he said. "We want our producers to be price makers, not price takers." To get there, he said, producers need to ask their veterinarians questions and invite them to be involved.

Continuing education for veterinarians is the pathway to creating value for our producers, Spare said. "It expands our ability to help people succeed in their operations and to be profitable."

Editor's Note: *Nicole Lane is an industry information intern for Certified Angus Beef LLC.*