Participant Assessments of the 2014 Value-Added Beef Conference

Conference Evaluation Summary
Participant Assessments of the 2014 Value-Added Beef Conference

The inaugural 2014 Value-Added Beef Conference was a solid success with 119 participants seeking more knowledge of marketing beef direct from the farm to the consumers. The conference was held in Manchester on March 18-19 with 17 presenters in various general and concurrent sessions. Speakers represented the University of Tennessee, USDA, TDA and several farmers and entrepreneurs that are already active in direct marketing beef. In addition to educational sessions, the conference also featured networking opportunities in the trade show with representatives from 14 agencies, sponsors and information providers. A unique feature of the conference was the opportunity for attendees to visit with representatives from four different regulatory agencies that are involved with meat marketing.

While a majority of the participants were from Tennessee, participants from three other states also attended the conference. The conference was conducted as part of the Tennessee Value-Added Beef program, which is funded in part by UT Extension, USDA and TDA. Other sponsors of the conference included Farm Credit Mid-America, Tennessee Farmers Cooperative and the Tennessee Farm Bureau. Other collaborators included the Tennessee Beef Industry Council and the Tennessee Cattlemen’s Association.

At the conclusion of the conference, participants were asked to complete an evaluation form. Fifty one evaluation forms were returned for a 43 percent response. This report summarizes those evaluations.

Overall Assessment

Participants provided overall assessment of the workshop by rating its usefulness and indicating whether they would recommend the conference to others. Table 1 shows that using a 1 to 5 scale, where 5 is extremely useful and 1 is not very useful, the average rating of the overall usefulness of the conference is a 4.5. As shown in Figure 1, when asked if they would recommend the conference to someone else, 94 percent of the respondents said yes.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Usefulness</th>
<th>Score</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mean</td>
<td>4.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total (n)</td>
<td>49</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Participants scored how much they learned on each of nine topics that were presented at the conference, using a scale of 1 to 5, where 1 was “no increase in understanding” and 5 was “huge and profound increase in understanding.” Figure 2 presents average scores for each presentation topic. To identify content areas about which participants gained little understanding, Table 2 presents the percentage of participants who scored the content areas as a “1” or a “2” (where 1 represents no increase in understanding and 2 represents little increase in understanding).

![Figure 1. Would You Recommend This Conference to Someone Else?](image)

![Figure 2. Participants' Assessments of Change in Their Understanding](image)

1 = No increase in understanding
5 = Huge & profound increase in understanding

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**Knowledge**

Participants scored how much they learned on each of nine topics that were presented at the conference, using a scale of 1 to 5, where 1 was “no increase in understanding” and 5 was “huge and profound increase in understanding.” Figure 2 presents average scores for each presentation topic. To identify content areas about which participants gained little understanding, Table 2 presents the percentage of participants who scored the content areas as a “1” or a “2” (where 1 represents no increase in understanding and 2 represents little increase in understanding).
Participants were asked to identify two or three things they planned to implement or change as a result of what they learned at the conference. These identified activities/changes are listed below. The numbers that follow each item indicate the number of participants who named that item.

- Make a change in marketing/selling venues (14)
- Adjust or improve forages (6)
- Finishing calves/cows, techniques (6)
- Assess, prepare for, or delay retail sales (5)
- Improve producer/consumer communications and relationship (5)
- Change something on labels (4)
- Rethink/implement direct sales (4)
- Improve genetics, genetic/breed selection (3)
- Better management to produce a consistent product (3)
- Increase prices (3)
- Change/re-evaluate pricing (2)
- Improve record keeping (2)
- Start selling by live weight rather than hanging weight (2)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Content area</th>
<th>Percent of “1” and “2” scores</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Understanding regulations</td>
<td>7.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Understanding consumer preferences for local beef</td>
<td>4.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Understanding local &amp; conventional finishing/production systems</td>
<td>4.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Working with your processor to get the desired meat cuts for customers</td>
<td>7.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Having labels in compliance</td>
<td>5.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Analyzing costs of finishing &amp; direct marketing</td>
<td>4.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Understanding forage systems or grass-fed beef</td>
<td>5.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Selecting the most appropriate animal for specific local finishing goals</td>
<td>7.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Understanding how management &amp; genetics affect meat quality</td>
<td>5.9</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Start using a bill of sale (2)
Cuts: offer more or specific types (2)
Grass fed (move to or focus on) (2)
Cost (3)
  1. Educate potential value-added producers about costs of finishing and retail marketing of beef
  2. Develop a budget: breeding, feeding, transportation to market
  3. Do better job at cost analysis
Miscellaneous (6):
  1. Focus on feed efficiency
  2. Maybe sell weaned calves rather than background and feed out
  3. Start custom-exempt sales
  4. Use value-added TN Agricultural Enhancement Program
  5. Investigate a locally grown network
  6. Change processor because of contact made at the conference

SIGNIFICANTLY, 100 PERCENT OF PARTICIPANTS WHO MAKE FARM DECISIONS REPORTED THAT THEY DID LEARN THINGS AT THE CONFERENCE THAT WILL HELP THEM MAKE DECISIONS AND CHANGES TO INCREASE SALES, REDUCE COSTS AND/OR MARKET THEIR PRODUCTS MORE EFFECTIVELY.

NETWORKING AND LEARNING

Participants were asked to evaluate three specific networking and learning opportunities that were provided in the conference:
  1. Networking at the trade show
  2. Interacting with producer panelist in the panel discussions
  3. Making contact with regulatory officials

Participants were asked to rate each of these three opportunities using a scale of 1 to 5 where 1 was “not at all helpful” and 5 was “extremely helpful.” Table 3 presents the average score for each of these opportunities. Figure 3 shows additional details by providing
the percent of participants that scored each opportunity as a 1, 2, 3, 4 or 5. Participants seemed to value interacting with other “expert” producers better than their general networking and contacts with regulatory officials.

### Table 3. Participants’ assessment of opportunities for networking & learning: Mean Score on a Scale of 1 to 5

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Topics</th>
<th>Mean Score</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Networking at the trade show</td>
<td>3.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interacting with producer panelists in panel discussions</td>
<td>4.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Making contact with regulatory officials</td>
<td>3.8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Figure 3. Percent of Participants Scoring the Value of Three Different Networking and Learning Opportunities at the Conference**

Participants’ ratings: Scale is 1 “Not at all helpful” to 5 “Extremely helpful”
Best and Least Liked Aspects

Participants were asked to identify aspects and features of the conference that they liked best and liked least. Their responses are summarized below. The numbers that follow each item indicate the number of individuals who name that feature.

**Liked Best:**
Quality of speakers and relevance of information (9)
Opportunity to ask questions and discuss during breakouts and panel (9)
Producers as speakers (7)
Networking opportunities (6)
Specific presenters (5)
  - Gary Bates
  - Andrew Griffith
  - James Yoder’s perspective as a processor
  - Justin Rhinehart
  - Panel discussions - especially Johnny Rogers and Claybrook Farms
Food/facilities (4)
All great/well planned (3)
Real life experience examples (2)
Focus on marketing (2)
Miscellaneous:
  - Info on finishing beef
  - Versatility
  - The bringing together of all facets of producing local beef
  - Labeling discussion, forage discussion
  - “You Tube” video on heifer spaying
  - Realistic data about budgeting, finances
**Liked Least**
Length of sessions (too long) (5)
More frequent breaks would be better (2)
Could not attend all breakouts; provide handout from each breakout to all participants (4)
Content issues (6)
  - Would like to have names and contacts of participants.
  - More info needed on laws and regulations. Need better information about label requirements.
  - Some speakers did not seem to understand the audience. We did not need a review of Department of Agriculture regulatory duties or USDA labeling regulations. Did not address interest/focus of this group.
  - Some presentations were too vague - more like pep talks.
  - Nonspecific presentation by government representatives isn’t relevant.
  - Costs of retail meat sales and live animal sales data was very skewed, especially if new to this industry.

**Miscellaneous Responses**
  - Travel distance from Northwest Alabama
  - Panel discussions
  - Trade show
  - Cool temp setting in room
  - Unsweetened tea
  - Cut too many questions off - better to be off schedule and run over. Let all questions be asked. Maybe allow more time for questions.
Future Topics

Lastly, participants offered the following suggestions of topics for future value-added beef workshops or conferences.

- Grass finishing, grass vs. grain fed (3)
- Marketing techniques and strategies (3)
- Reproduction (2)
- Farm tour
- Packing facility tour
- Record-keeping software (2)
- Multi-media and social media use (2)

Miscellaneous:
- More on how to tell when product is ready to market
- Budgeting/finances for the farmer
- A handout listing all USDA-approved meat processors would be great, but I did get the USDA website address where I can find them. We have a shortage of AL meat processors.
- Would be interested in hearing from buyers of local meat
- Consider adding information, producers and exhibitors on marketing other farm-fresh meats (pork, poultry, lamb, etc.)
- Anytime you have this many producers at a meeting you need to have a session on animal welfare and treatment.
- Surprise me.
- Opportunities to use entire animal (organs, hide, hooves, etc.)
- Specific practices for year-round forage
- Live meat cutting demonstration
- List of locations of farmers markets across state
- Exact steps on getting setup with TDA and USDA
- How do we educate the consumer?
- Include panel of processors and panel of farmers (like the Yoder dinner speech).
- Have information on Firsthand Foods and Marksbury farm (KY) and others buying meat from farmers.
- There are lots of questions about chickens (regulations, marketing, production, mobile harvesting, etc.).
The 2014 Tennessee Value-Added Beef Conference was conducted as part of the Tennessee Value-Added Beef Program. Support for the Tennessee Value-Added Beef Program is provided by various sources. State funds for this project were matched with Federal funds under the Federal-State Marketing Improvement Program of the USDA Agricultural Marketing Service, U.S. Department of Agriculture. In addition, funding support was also made possible from the sale of agricultural specialty license plates (the “Ag Tag”). Funds received from Ag Tag sales are returned to the agricultural community in the form of grants for youth programs, marketing development projects and other agriculture activities.

Data entered and summarized by the Human Dimensions Research Lab.

CPA Info # 220 5/14