The 2016 Beef Improvement Federation (BIF) Convention, held June 14 – 16 in Manhattan, Kan., and hosted by Kansas State University, saw more than 600 attendees learn and engage on issues affecting the improvement of performance measurement and genetics in the beef industry. A strong line-up of speakers who market to large beef buyers and deal daily with consumer demand issues helped kick off the convention. After setting the stage with guest speakers, attendees were engaged to think about where we have been over the past 20 years as an industry and where we may be in 2036. Afternoon breakout sessions took attendees deeper into the details of areas such as genomics and genetic selection, end product improvement, efficiency and adaptability, emerging technology and producer applications.

The conference began with a unique group of beef industry experts who set the stage by outlining consumer demands and expectations. John Stika with Certified Angus Beef (CAB) provided an overview of CAB success, sharing the consistent upward growth trajectory of the brand, with 98% increase in demand over the past 15 years. The brand focuses on a high quality eating experience and builds on the assumption that “taste is king.”

Current consumer trends, Stika observed, are centered on consumer trust of our product and how we produce it. “Local” is trendy and the definition is fuzzy, but a local claim increases consumer trust. Telling the beef production story also increases consumer trust.

Convention attendees were rallied to focus on understanding where the production sector is and where it could be in the future. Glyn Tonsor and Ted Schroeder, ag economists with Kansas State University, keynoted on current advantages of the U.S. beef industry relative to competitors. Tonsor recognized a sound base of feed grains supply, robust transportation system, strong packing industry, technology availability and adoption, and commitment to food safety as advantages, but advised that improvements are still possible and needed. Schroeder noted that beef industry prosperity depends upon consumer spending decisions. He urged the beef industry to pay close attention to rapidly growing demographic segments in the U.S. and a trend towards increasing diversity of culture and shifting social norms.

A wide range of hot topics were covered in the technical breakout sessions, including a call by Ty Lawrence, West Texas A&M University, to examine the U.S. yielding grading formula to better capture changes in the cattle population and feeding management practices. He touted the usefulness of camera-based grading systems as an opportunity for making future grading improvements. Dick Beck of the King Ranch Institute for Ranch Management, shared evidence that the future is challenging to predict but yet encouraged producers to look for high-leverage interventions in production systems to achieve efficient and profitable beef production. Importantly, he stated, this will need to occur in an environment characterized by a growing population, changing perceptions of agriculture and shifting social norms.

There is a complicated and utilization of performance records to improve efficiency, profitability and sustainability of beef production. To view the complete convention proceedings, visit www.beefimprovement.org. As with any meeting that brings together leaders from multiple sectors of the beef industry, a tremendous value comes from interacting with speakers and participants through planned Q & A as well as hallway and meal time conversations. A young producer symposium kicks off the annual convention and is another cannot miss highlight that brings together the next generation of beef industry participants in a forum that promotes networking and engagement in beef improvement efforts. Mark your calendar now to experience the full value of the BIF Convention experience on May 31 – June 3, 2017 in Athens, Ga.