Welfare Symposium Highlights Latest in Cattle Research

By Chase DeCoite, Associate Director, Beef Quality Assurance

The fifth International Symposium on Beef Cattle Welfare was hosted by the Beef Cattle Institute at Kansas State University June 8-10. The three day symposium brought together nearly 150 international leaders and researchers in the beef cattle welfare arena to share and discuss the latest issues that face the beef cattle industry. The biennial event began in 2008 at Kansas State with the objective to address welfare issues faced by producers in many beef-producing areas across the world. Past hosts include the University of Saskatchewan (2012) and Iowa State University (2014).

Mike Siemens, PhD, Global Lead for Animal Welfare and Husbandry at Cargill, praised the opportunity to collaborate with so many industry leaders, saying, “Cargill values the International Symposium on Beef Cattle Welfare as it is a great place where we can understand the latest in welfare research to make informed decisions for our global company.”

The symposium kicked off with a summary of past welfare symposia delivered by Joe Stookey, PhD, University of Saskatchewan. Stookey highlighted the impact that the five symposiums have had on international collaboration and the advancement of beef cattle welfare research. Following the summary, attendees heard from various speakers who provided updates on topics such as pain management, heat stress in feedlot cattle, and Body Condition Score considerations. In a research update on pain management, Dr. Mike Kleinheinz, DVM, Iowa State University, highlighted the lack of analgesic drugs that are approved for cattle in the United States; this means that veterinarians and producers are dependent on other drugs, which are approved, to manage pain. Numerous studies are underway or have concluded researching the effects of various pain management techniques and medications.

Karen Schwartzkopf-Genswein, PhD, Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada, spoke on the issue of Lameness in Feedlot Cattle. In her presentation she highlighted the effects of lameness, including reduced growth performance and increased labor and drug costs for producers.

In a series of presentations on relationships between transportation and cattle welfare, Ron Gill, PhD, of Texas A&M touched on various facility designs and their impact on low stress cattle handling, using cattle instincts to reduce stress and increase efficiency when loading and unloading cattle. Tiffany Lee, PhD, Kansas State University, shared the latest research in transportation equipment and trailer design, with data that suggests current designs and cattle size might be leading to carcass bruising.

In addressing what might be the hottest topic in the cattle industry today, Dr. Mike Apley, DVM, of Kansas State presented on antibiotic stewardship and animal welfare. In his presentation Dr. Apley discussed the differences in how cattle producers and veterinarians perceive antibiotic use versus consumers’ perceptions, suggesting that if the cattle industry wants to keep antibiotics we need to focus on a few important points, including veterinary control of all uses of antimicrobials in animals, true stewardship of antibiotics by veterinarians and producers, research on therapy duration, a continued emphasis on prevention of infectious disease, and improved protocols and record keeping by the entire industry.

While the symposium offered the opportunity to share and discuss current research, the collaboration on future research and education that will stem from the event is far reaching and is sure to set direction for many years to come.

In honor of his contributions to the industry, two $12,000 graduate scholarships will be awarded in his name to graduate students pursuing careers in the beef industry.

For additional information visit www.nationalcattlemensfoundation.org or call 303-694-0305

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