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New ag program helps minimize risk for livestock, honeybees, farm-raised fish

By James Sedman and John Hewlett

One of the goals of the 2008 Food, Conservation, and Energy Act (the Farm Bill) was to eliminate the need for ad hoc disaster assistance that seems needed every year.

The bill established a permanent disaster trust fund and several programs to assist crop and livestock producers if a natural disaster occurs.

The Emergency Assistance for Livestock, Honeybees, and Farm-Raised Fish Program (ELAP) helps livestock producers manage the risk of natural disasters such as fires, disease, or blizzards.

ELAP is specifically intended to address losses not covered under other disaster programs established in the Farm Bill, including the Supplemental Revenue Assistance Program (SURE), the Livestock Forage Disaster Program (LFP), or the Livestock Indemnity Program (LIP).

ELAP Provisions

As with several of the new disaster programs, ELAP carries a crop insurance requirement. This excludes grazing land; however, if insurable crops are involved, they must be covered by a crop insurance policy or the Non-insured Crop Disaster Assistance Program (NAP).

Total disaster program payments cannot exceed $100,000 per year, and producers with an adjusted non-farm income of more than $500,000 are not eligible. Producers who experience an eligible loss must contact their Farm Service Agency personnel when the loss occurs. The ELAP program does cover species or events not usually covered by disaster payments (such as honeybees struck by colony collapse disorder).

Eligible Losses

Livestock producers with grazing losses associated with adverse weather or other conditions such as drought, hail, wildfire, or blizzards are eligible for ELAP assistance. The payment is determined by the lesser of 60 percent of either the total value of the grazing animal unit months (AUMs) lost or the total value of feed associated with all grazing days lost.

Payments on grazing losses cannot exceed 90 days. Feed losses associated with a disaster event are eligible, including: feedstuffs and forages destroyed, feed purchases required above the normal level, and transportation costs associated with replacing feedstuffs or additional feed. Producers must document the disaster event and any additional feed or other costs associated with the event.

In the case of feed losses, payments are made based on 60 percent of the price per unit of feed lost. Note that the price of replacement feed should include any documented delivery or other associated costs. ELAP also allows for payments on livestock mortality above normal levels not associated with a LIP-eligible loss. Payments for these losses in excess of normal mortality are made at 75 percent of market value of the livestock.

For More Information

A detailed policy paper entitled "Emergency Assistance for Livestock, Honeybees, and Farm Raised Fish (ELAP) Program: Wyoming" is available online at the Western Risk Management at agecon.uwyo.edu/riskmgt.

Visit the Western Risk Management Library's Web site at agecon.uwyo.edu/riskmgt for more information on this and other risk management topics.

Consult your local FSA personnel for more information on ELAP or other disaster programs or FSA's Web site at www.fsa.usda.gov and click Disaster Assistance Programs.

For more information on what crop insurance policies would qualify your operation for these programs, consult a local crop insurance agent. An agent should be able to tailor a policy to fit specific risk management planning needs. Insurance agents are listed on the RMA Web site at www.rma.usda.gov under Agent/company Locator in the right sidebar on the page.

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Additional stories describing other insurance options that help minimize risk can be viewed on pages 3-5 at http://InsuringSuccess.org

UW scientists examine effects of trait selection tools

By Scott Lake, Steve Paisley, and Kristi Cammack

The beef industry is alive and well with new buzz words.

Bull sale catalogs are brimming with terms such as RFI (residual feed intake) and genetic marker tests to assist in selection. The question that needs to be asked is, do these new selection tools really make a difference?

Will an animal that has markers for one or more desirable traits have greater production or have offspring with greater production?

Will selection of genetically superior animals result in greater profitability?

As much as we would like to believe this is true, the reality is we don't know. We are truly just hitting the tip of the iceberg with genetic selection technology. Prior to the development of genetic testing, seedstock producers have relied on expected progeny differences (EPD) and selecting specific bloodlines to improve their herds.

Use of Genetic Markers

Application of genetic markers in animal selection and breeding may dramatically accelerate this genetic improvement in beef cattle, which have a long genetic interval. Marker-assisted selection may increase rate of genetic gain by 15 to 30 percent. Marker-assisted selection theoretically allows for accurate selection of specific DNA variations associated with a measurable difference or effect on complex traits. However, questions remain as to how variation in animal performance is explained by genetic selection.

Ultrasonography has been widely used throughout the beef industry to measure and predict carcass characteristics. However, to our knowledge, validation of genetic selection against ultrasound data and actual performance and EPDs has not happened. Likewise, using artificial insemination along with these other technologies provides potential for beef producers to increase genetic improvement faster compared to bull breeding.

The University of Wyoming, South Dakota State University, Purdue University, Silver Spur Ranches (Encampment), Heaton Land & Livestock (Alton, Utah), and Pfizer Animal Health have teamed to investigate the effects and accuracy of genetic testing/selection in an entire beef system.

Most research conducted at universities or in the private sector focus on one trait or one aspect of beef production. What makes this approach unique is that this is a long-term commitment investigating the impact of genetic selection on birthweights, weaning weights, feedlot performance, carcass characteristics, female replacement longevity, feed efficiency, and overall profitability.

This project will encompass more than 3,000 heifers across four states. All heifers will be artificially inseminated to allow for a true determination of the value of the practice and its impact on genetic selection and profitability. Steer calves born from heifers will be tracked through the feedlot to measure feedlot performance (average daily gain, days on feed, etc.).

Evaluate Steer Performance

Ultrasound will be used to examine steers 30 days after entry into the feedlot and again immediately prior to slaughter. Actual performance data, ultrasound data, and sire EDP data will be compared with the genetic marker prediction data to provide a comparison of technologies to help further understanding of the effectiveness of selection technologies to improve beef quality.

USDA photo

The data from this research will help us better understand the accuracy, and, therefore, the management power, of genetic testing tools.

Can we combine ultrasound and genetic testing to enhance accuracy?

If we continue to develop genetic testing, further refining the tools that are now emerging, can we move away from traditional breeding tools such as bloodlines and pedigrees when making decisions?

There are some exciting questions we need to study.

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