

## NEW RELEASE

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Contact: Sherry Doubet  
303-840-4343

### **First Cow Efficiency Congress Relays Research to Producer Profitability**

**Dickinson, N.D.** – Cowherd efficiency and ranch profitability was the focus of the World Cattlemen's Cow Efficiency Congress in Dickinson, N.D., Sept. 1-3, hosted by the North Dakota State University's (NDSU) Dickinson Research Center and the American Aberdeen Association. More than 100 attendees from thirteen states and Canada gathered to hear from leading university researchers who have studied keys to profitability in the cattle industry and producers who have implemented the research in their own herds.

"It was exciting to see the data supporting the added value of moderately-framed cattle from NDSU research," said Janis Black, American Aberdeen Association President. "As an Aberdeen breeder, I have known this, but to have backup from research is so important for the advancement of our breed into the mainstream cattle market."

The Congress kicked off Friday, Sept. 1, with a discussion centered on cow efficiency, economics and rebranding strategies, followed by an evening meal at the Medora Pitchfork Fondue and the Medora Musical at the Burning Hills Amphitheater.

Saturday, Sept. 2 was jam-packed with valuable data on cow genetic and economic efficiency intended for producers to take back to any type of operation. Presentations were given by researchers and economists from North Dakota State University and Oklahoma State University.

The Dickinson Research Center was the ideal location to host the first Congress. They have been studying Moderator females for years under the direction of Kris Ringwall, PhD., NDSU Extension Beef Specialist, who leads the research at this facility. He presented results on cow size as it relates to herd and feedlot performance.

"Managing cow size is a function of profit and sustainability," said Ringwall. "We are coming out of a drought year and we see ours cows in this area coming out in sustained condition."

Ringwall emphasized that as cows get larger, their nutritional needs have not changed and it's harder to keep enough feed in front of them to maintain their condition. That is why focusing on smaller-framed, efficient cattle has been a key factor to NDSU's research while still maintaining performance and minimizing calving difficulty.

"Our current efforts are looking at land-based beef production, which means beef performance by acre versus per head," said Ringwall. "Because the animals are smaller, you are going to stock more of them and can get 20-30 percent increase per acre output."

The ideal smaller cow size that Ringwall is evaluating is around 1,100 pounds, versus a 1,400 pound cow in most cattle operations. Yet, their progeny are performing just as well in the feedyard. Over the course of four to five years, they've evaluated their Aberdeen-influenced steers in a commercial feedlot, which have all met the current specs for the market.

“Our 2015 steer calves had an average carcass weight of 891 lbs, which is essentially 80 percent of their mature weight on the rail,” said Ringwall. “We have kept the muscling on these cattle, which is key because that’s our product.”

Ringwall encouraged producers to do the math and figure out how to succeed at moderating cow size.

“It’s important for Aberdeen breeders to understand they are a key tool to helping the industry in managing cow size,” he concluded.

David Lalman, PhD., Oklahoma State University, Professor and Extension Beef Cattle Specialist, continued the efficiency theme by covering how to develop a cow herd that fits the producer’s ranch environment.

“Cow efficiency is a broad term and it is complicated because of the interactions with the environment, genetics and so on, but keeping good records is the place to begin,” said Lalman. “If producers can collect good records from a reproductive standpoint, such as pregnancy rates and weaning rates, you can benchmark your operation’s performance over time and work to improve on those weaknesses.”

Lalman noted that in the Southern Great Plains where he does his research, they have a fairly long grazing season and their optimal cow weight is between the 1,100 to 1,200-pound range. However, he explains that environment is key.

“We want to match cows to their environment and the different factors that influence that to ensure the cow is highly reproductively efficient,” said Lalman, “That means a cow who is producing a calf every 365 days for at least 12 consecutive years, trouble free, low cost, utilizes your country, gains well in the good years and thrives in the bad years and produces progeny that are acceptable and valuable after they leave the ranch gate.”

“Rapid change is the norm in the cattle industry now,” Lalman remarked.

“The obvious thing we’ve seen at this field day is that you can modify a mature cow frame size and weight in one generation,” he said. “For some operations, that would be an advantage and we are seeing other breeds also modifying to adapt to a given environment. We have the tools to do that now that we didn’t have 20-25 years ago.”

The rest of the field day covered impacts of cow size and frame on carcass traits, cow nutrition, soil and forage health, how to select efficient cows and effects of frame size on efficiency and longevity of beef cows, all from NDSU and OSU researchers.

Saturday evening wrapped-up with a soil health demonstration and dinner at the Shelter Ranch with Nationally-known cowboy poet, Rodney Nelson. Dinner was sponsored by the Midwest Aberdeen Breeders.

The Congress concluded on Sunday, Sept. 3 with a cattle photography workshop led by Tracey Koester of Cow Camp Promotions and a scramble golf tournament for attendees. The Congress was sponsored by American Aberdeen Association, Rang-Ward Power Grazer from Nation, Alberta, Can., Zoetis and Agweek Magazine.

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