

Description

Clifton Martin and Garth Ruff discuss Garth's recent hiring as the OSU Extension Beef Specialist and current trends in the Beef Industry. We cover trends in Ohio, the role of the OSU Extension Beef Specialist, opportunities for outreach, the status of Beef Quality Assurance, and key opportunities for producers to stay ahead of the curve.

The transcript, slightly edited from the original conversation, but still preserving the flow of the conversation, is provided below. Many grammatical errors are present in the text because of the flow of spoken word in live conversation.

We value your feedback and you can share your thoughts and suggestions with us at go.osu.edu/inbox.

Transcript

Clifton Martin

This is Clifton Martin with Ohio State University Extension in Muskingum County and today is September 17th, 2020. I'm sitting down for a short interview with Garth Ruff, who's the new OSU beef specialist and we've got a few things to share today about current trends in the beef industry and Garth's role at OSU. We're going to jump right into the conversation, so Garth if you could give me the who, what, where, when, and tell me what it is you do at Ohio State University.

Garth Ruff

Thanks Clifton, I began September 1st as the new OSU Extension beef cattle field specialist. I'm housed out in the former Eastern Regional Extension Office there at the Belle Valley, the one at the bottom of the hill, as people like to refer to it.

You know, just really getting started and it's my role, or my position is designed, to address education needs for high as beef industry by working with their beef producers or County extension educators such as yourself and our faculty within various Department at Ohio State within the college I'm housed there within the Department of extension just like the rest of our field specialists.

But I've also had jointed joint appointment with the Department of Animal Science.

Clifton Martin

So we'll see you in the future, with perhaps a lot of different extension program that we might do in the area, and especially any work that happens down at Belle Valley.

So you're in the beef industry, what's a 10,000 foot fly over of the beef industry in Ohio right now? Obviously, there's lots of storylines, you know, in 2020 about different things, and we saw a lot with the animal industry early on in the year. How does your position provide support? Where do you fit in?

Garth Ruff

Yeah, so the beef industry here in Ohio's, uh, you know, we're not super large in numbers compared to, you know, Kentucky directly to the South and some of the western states. It's very diverse. We really have all segments of the beef cattle production cycle, not only a cow calf state.

Especially here in the eastern and southern parts of Ohio, we also have stocker backgrounders. We have feed lot producers a lot in the western northwest parts of state, which those folks are farmer feeders and we also have a small large number of small meat processors here in the state. Now we'll talk more about them here, here shortly.

Within a cow calf segment. We got commercial producers quite a few seedstock producers here in Ohio, and then we have our club, calf operators herd size. As you know, Muskingum County is a great example. Ranges from folks have 5 to 6 cows all the way to our largest operator in the state that has over.

2000 cows with herd average in state being 17. So my role, you know is really to do the most good for the greatest amount of producers and a lot of times we talk about beef cattle here in Ohio it's really a small farm and small herd conversation and how to help those folks in terms of Education and efficiency.

Clifton Martin

And what would be some current trends? So I think you kind of alluded to a few things here. You know, we've got a lot of small, small herd growers like you said. But you know what are the current trends that we see in the beef industry right now that impact Ohio producers?

Garth Ruff

Well, I think you know we can start with COVID-19. That's probably the biggest thing here in the impact and that this pandemic has had on our producers here in Ohio. And really is that demand for local beef and local meat in general has skyrocketed here across the state in the past six months.

Many small processors have no appointments available for the rest of this year. Reserving harvest dates for cattle and all species well into 2021 and in 2022 at this point, so that's probably the biggest one here. Most recently, some other trends that we're starting to see across various segments of beef production is the increased use of beef Sires in the dairy industry. You know, the questions arise what bulls should be used on those dairy cows, where those crossbred calves fit in the marketplace and also with another wet spring across parts of the state. We still struggle with continuing to make quality forage and timely first cutting hay and the impacts of that going forward over the past three to four years, if not mitigated, you know what are those impacts on the cow, herd and reproduction going here into 2021.

Clifton Martin

And that's certainly a conversation in extension offices we probably hear a lot about the other three just mentioned Covid 19 Beef Sires and the wet spring and the impact there. I think extension offices like myself and the one you just worked at. We have these those conversations with a lot of people so absolutely.

Another program that we in extension anyways and really nationwide but in Ohio we got out in front of this pretty quick was the beef quality assurance program. You could almost call this a trend. I mean in the recent last few years more attention has been given to it and you know we the certification was

rolled out and we were kind of put into this three year re-certification cycle and right now we're coming around up on the date where a lot of people who originally were certified would be getting newly re-certified. At this point, what do you see happening in that program? Are there things people can do to try to stay ahead of the curve and use the program to their advantage. I mean, I think that's probably a good way for a lot of people to think about these things: what can they do to take advantage of it and use it? What are your thoughts on that?

Garth Ruff

Yeah, you know it's like consumer demand to know more about like beef product and really a focus on animal handling.

Animal welfare and beef quality assurance is certainly here to stay, for our producers, feeding any amount of cattle. Having that beef quality assurance certification is really their key to the marketplace, guaranteeing them market access or their fed cattle for the rest of our beef producers. And, as you allude to, I think here in Ohio we really hit things out of the park in terms of getting everybody across the different segments through that beef quality assurance program. In 2018, if I'm a Stocker Backgrounder or producer that utilizes direct marketing, I have that BQA certification, kind of as another tool in my marketing toolbox, especially for those direct marketing folks being able to, you know, advertise those cattle being produced under best management practices through beef quality assurance. Looking in the re certification in 2021, hopefully we're able to do some face to face meetings.

Yeah, I think we're all cooped up and zoomed out, but we'll have to see what we can do there. We are in the process of making some more virtual resources here in the next few weeks. And really, you know we always have that opportunity to do some of that virtual teaching. And our producers can take that BQA Re certification online if need be.

Clifton Martin

So certainly for it in person teaching, we've got a lot of obstacles in the way, but there are opportunities and like you said, this program can be completed online, so kind of something for folks to keep in mind if they have BQA in their horizons here.

I think just thinking back to, or going back to your program, and then what you're going to be doing at Ohio State, as you kind of vision and then look forward and think about what you might be doing, what are your priorities for educational outreach in the next few years?

Garth Ruff

Yeah, so first and foremost I think in a normal situation we'd be doing this now, is get out, get out to the counties with the County extension educators and you know, meet me producers across state and really assess their needs and you know figure out what they need in terms of Education and resources from OSU extension.

Really what I'd like to do is get to the point where we have a tool that's developed that helps our beef producers evaluate the efficiency and profit profitability into their operation. In my mind, that's myself, a county extension educator, maybe it's an AG lender making a visit to a farm, discussing and observing different aspects of the producer's operation, whether it's forages, facilities, or just cow management, and being able to use it. Use that tool and make recommendations to help improve profitability that

beef enterprise through implementing different practices. Obviously forage quality and alternatives, forage sources such as balage continues to be a topic of interest and really a strength of our beef team here at Ohio State for feed lot operators. You know they're really asking for some risk management education and COVID-19 kind of reinforces the need for risk management for our fed cattle producers here in Ohio.

Clifton Martin

You mentioned facilities. Real quick. I'll stick in a note here about a conversation I hear a lot, especially as we talked about BQA, it's kind of an off the cuff question here, what is the impact of a handling facility at a cow calf operation?

Garth Ruff

When you have, and it doesn't have to be state of the art first and foremost, but having it workable handling facility on a cow calf operation, it opens doors for the for those feeder calves, there's weaned calves...The opportunity to have them weaned, vaccinated, preconditioned and really adds value.

Having a working facility, you know, even if you've got 20 cows, let's say, it can really pay for itself in a short period of time to the value added to those calves.

Clifton Martin

It's a conversation I hear a lot and I think as we have a lot of small farms or sometimes a investment there in the handling facilities and so it becomes a conversation that that I see is just open people helping producers to think about that and see what they can do to get a fill a facility install. It always seems like a pretty important step if they can do it.

Um, if I'm a producer looking to make an improvement to increase and and maybe I'm answering my question here. If I'm a producer looking to make an improvement to increase marketability quality and stay ahead of the curve, what should I be paying attention to in today's environment?

Garth Ruff

Yes, I kind of boiled this one down to really three things. One is know your cost of production.

Having worked in Northwest Ohio, I think it's a lot easier thing to do, maybe in our agronomic setting, but it can be done in terms of beef cattle know across the production and whether it's the cost of maintaining cow for a year or at a pound of gain to a calf. You know we got to know what we have in that animal before we can make a marketing decision.

Two, follow the markets you know our most profitable producers are selling cattle at the right time, really paying attention to things such as seasonality in the marketplace and three, I think, goes back to our previous conversation. There a little bit on facilities we need to be critical as beef producers of our operations.

You know the most costly word that I see in the beef industry here across the state has probably been tradition. Or that unwillingness to change more so than in any other segment of Agriculture, production, agriculture, you know and continuous improvement I think, should be a goal in terms of efficiency and profitability and that ultimately leads to sustainability of that operation, whether it's

facilities or that's changing the way we manage our cow herd looking at some, maybe more unconventional management strategies such as early weaning. Just a ton of examples there that can fit a given operation.

Clifton Martin

That's the extent of the questions I had. Do you have any other tips or tricks or thoughts right now to share with our listeners?

Garth Ruff

You know, really, at this point in time, I kind of want to hear from our beef producers at the state across the state if possible. I'm pretty easy to get ahold of via email or cell phone that information's house in our main extension website.

Clifton Martin

We will be sure to add that to the notes here with the audio recording that gets posted on the beef website as well. Garth, it's great to spend this time chatting with you and just getting a little bit of a heads up on the work you might be doing here in the future and just some of the trends that we're seeing right now in beef industry. We look forward to working with you more here as we go forward in the coming months.

Thank you.

Clifton Martin

Hi Clifton Martin again, thanks for taking a few minutes out of your day to listen to our discussion. I hope it was valuable for you here at OSU extension. We always value feedback and we would really appreciate your suggestions which you can give to us at the website go.osu.edu/inbox. Thanks again and have a great day.