

Tools for Building Better Cows Conference

Speaker Biographies

Dr. John Basarab, is a Senior Beef Research Scientist with Alberta Agriculture, Food and Rural Development in Lacombe. John has over 25 years experience in beef cattle production and management. His current research includes projects on improving feed efficiency; reducing wintering feed cost of beef cows, and improving beef carcass consistency and quality. He is an Adjunct Professor at the University of Alberta and is a member of the Western Forage Beef Group, the Canadian Institute of Agrologists and the Canadian Society of Animal Science. He is also the author of more than 200 scientific and extension articles on beef cattle production and has spoken at many international conferences and cow-calf short courses. John received his Ph.D. degree in Animal Genetics and Biochemistry in 1981 from the University of Alberta.

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Randy Kaiser, runs a purebred cattle operation consisting of 100 registered Welsh Black and 50 Galloway brood cows. Randy began raising Welsh Blacks 15 years ago and started the Galloway herd in 1999. Began participating in vertical integration 3 years ago, and works with Canadian Celtic Cattle Company supplying branded Welsh Black and Galloway beef to High end restaurants and Beef shops in Calgary Alberta. Sell about 35 two year old bulls each year across Canada. Taken part in three years worth of Net Feed Efficiency trials at Olds College and Cattleland Feedyards. Randy sees Net Feed Efficiency as an important tool to add profit to the producers bottom line by cutting his feed bill which is the lion's share of every cow calf or feedlot budget.

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Weldon Van Thomson was born and raised on a cow-calf operation in Southern Alberta; Graduated Brigham Young University with Bachelors in Agronomy and minor in Animal Science; Worked in the Feed Industry in both US and Alberta for 9 years before becoming manager of Deseret Ranches of Alberta; coming onto 27 years with DRA. Deseret is a 110,000 acre cow-calf operation on the Milk River Ridge in Southern Alberta between Lethbridge and the US border. Run 6500 cows and up to 3500 yearlings. Also supervise a 50,000 acre ranch in Montana with 1500 cows and 4000 yearlings. Been involved with Alberta Beef Producers, CCA etc.

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Dr. Denny Crews was raised on a cattle and citrus operation in southern Florida. Denny was active in 4-H and agricultural leadership activities, and he showed purebred Brahman cattle from the family ranch. His graduate studies at the University of Florida at Gainesville led to an M.S. degree in beef cattle science in 1992. Denny obtained his Ph.D. degree in beef quantitative genetics in 1996 from Louisiana State University, Baton Rouge. From January 1997 to May, 1998, Dr. Crews was a post-doctoral researcher in beef genetics at the Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada Research Centre in Lethbridge. He is now a research scientist and the program leader for beef quantitative genomics at Lethbridge and AAFC national study leader for livestock genetics and genomics. Dr. Crews is a member of several coordinated international research committees on beef genetics and national cattle evaluation, and is an advisor to the breed improvement efforts of four North American beef breed associations. Dr. Crews currently conducts research in the areas of large-scale genetic evaluation and improvement of beef cattle for economically relevant traits, such as maternal productivity, feed efficiency, and carcass merit.

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Scott Lees has been General Manager at Soderghen Ranches for the past 15 years. They farm 5,000 acres, and run 5 breeds of cattle with 1500 mother cows and operate a 5000 head feedlot. Scott grew up on a farm in SE Saskatchewan.

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Sean McGrath P.Ag. Sean grew up on a 5th generation commercial cattle operation southeast of Vermilion, Alberta. In 1999 he completed his cooperative education degree from the University of Saskatchewan and started work fulltime with the Canadian Charolais Association as their breed improvement coordinator. In December of 2002, Sean decided to pursue a consulting career focusing on livestock genetics. Currently Sean cooperates with a working group of consultants to offer breed improvement services to a variety of beef breeds and other livestock organizations. Sean, his wife Tanya and their family live in Vermilion and are actively engaged in their family ranching operation. Sean has extensive experience in progeny test programs, education and extension, and performance program development at an industry and individual scale.

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Bart Holowath started with Western Feedlots Ltd. 10 years ago and has worked his way up from Assistant Cattle Manager, to General Manager Cattle Operations responsible for all 3 sites, High River, Mossliagh and Strathmore. Bart was raised on a mixed farm & purebred cattle operation near Rumsey AB. Bart is getting married in Victoria a month from now. Bart's hobbies include working cow horses and golf. He has two boys ages 12 and 13.

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Rod Wendorff has lived in southern Alberta all 46 years of his life. 25 years ago Rod was married to Sherri Palmer and they have 6 children, 1 son-in-law, 1 daughter-in-law, and 2 grand kids due this summer. Rod has been in the cattle business for the past 28 years. Along with cattle Rod managed the Payroll Department for the City of Lethbridge from 1987 – 1994. Rod has been ultrasounding cattle in feedlots and ranches for the past 12 years and owns and operates Windy Ridge Ultrasound. The best part of the job is meeting and getting to know so many cattle people.

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Grant Hirsche, Hirche Herefords, runs 600 head of purebred Hereford and Angus Cows. Grant has shown a keen interest in using various tools to improve his breeding herd over the years, including embryo transfer, EPDs and ultrasound. Grant has been involved in NFE testing at Olds College since the bull test started in the fall of 2002. Grant owns and operates Hirsche Fraser Meats, which opened in Okotoks in response to the BSE crisis. One of the benefits of selling meat directly to consumers is that he gets immediate feedback on the quality of beef consumers are demanding.

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