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## Clientele Impact for Beef Producers from a Grass-Roots Style of Extension Programming

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PREVIOUS  
ARTICLE



ISSUE  
CONTENTS



NEXT  
ARTICLE



## Clientele Impact for Beef Producers from a Grass-Roots Style of Extension Programming

### Abstract

The Alachua County Master Cattlemen program is developed for small beef producers to help increase profitability. Because small beef producers are at a disadvantage in marketing truck loads of cattle and retaining ownership, educational programs relating to beef cattle management are used to give producers tools to manage their cattle in order to become more profitable. As a result of these programs, a small beef cooperative has been formed to take advantage of marketing alternatives. This cooperative has shown a significant increase in price per pound received, and this has resulted in a cumulative economic impact of \$42,500.

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## Introduction

Today's beef producers are facing a rapidly changing industry that is very much consumer driven. Over the past 10 years, the development of marketing through some type of a "connected structure," such as an alliance affiliation or a cooperative among producers, has significantly increased. These marketing groups attempt to aid the producer in capturing the highest value for the beef produced.

Alachua County currently ranks 14th in Florida in beef cattle numbers (Florida Department of Agriculture, 2002). Producers in the county continue to market a majority of their calves through livestock markets in the surrounding counties, receiving discounted feeder calf prices. The discounted prices are due to:

- Lack of uniformity,
- Co-mingling of calves,
- Poor herd health,
- Poor genetics, and
- Producers not preconditioning the calves.

## Purpose

To meet the needs of the livestock advisory committee's (made of local producers, veterinarians, and agricultural leaders in the community) recommendations, a program was developed titled "Alachua County Master Cattlemen Program." This program was designed after the Georgia program of the same name. The goal of the Alachua County Master Cattlemen Program was to increase beef cattle reproduction efficiency using expected progeny differences (EPD) and to

increase total pounds of beef produced, thereby increasing producers' profitability.

Through the Alachua County Master Cattlemen program, beef producers could improve profitability by taking advantage of new marketing programs or developing cooperatives of their own. Moreover, producers could improve profitability through an increase in production efficiency, improved forages, reproduction, and genetic and herd health management while reducing costs per animal weaned or retained in ownership.

The average herd size is relatively small, so producers must be able to group or sort a uniform set of calves together, as truck load lots. Additionally, in order to market a uniform set of cattle, herd health and nutrition play a significant factor in obtaining a healthy group of cattle with proper vaccinations that would fit the ideal market weights. The significant concerns developed by the advisory committee must all fit together in order for a successful marketing program to be implemented.

## **Procedures**

The Alachua County Master Cattlemen Program consists of four programs, one program per week for 4 weeks. Based upon the recommendations of the advisory committee, the following topics were included:

1. Cattle Reproduction & Expected Progeny Differences;
2. Feeding the Cow;
3. Cattle Economics;
4. Herd Health;
5. Calf Marketing;
6. Carcass Quality and Pricing; and
7. Chute Side Manners.

The Extension agent and state specialists conducted the educational programs using both classroom and hands-on instruction.

Objectives of the program were as follows.

1. 50% of the beef cattle producers attending the program would increase in knowledge, convey positive aspirations, and make at least one practice change in genetics, reproduction, nutrition, economics, herd health, and/or marketing.
2. As a result of the cooperative marketing discussions, 10% of the producers would develop a multi-county marketing co-op.

## **Promotion/Marketing**

The program was advertised in the local newspaper (circ. 3000) and in the Florida Cattlemen's magazine (circ. 5000). The Extension agent promoted the program in the monthly newsletter, reaching 575 producers. Flyers were also posted in local agribusinesses. Attendance at the Alachua County Master Cattlemen Program averaged 52 people at each program. Participants paid a registration fee of \$10 for the entire 5-week program, and local Animal Health Representatives and Feed Companies provided sponsorship.

## **Results and Evaluation**

At the conclusion of all four programs, a post evaluation questionnaire was given to measure knowledge gained from the Master Cattlemen Programs. Eighty percent of those attending turned in the evaluation at the conclusion of the program, and the following data was collected.

### **Knowledge Gained**

- 94% of those attending said the EPD discussion helped them to understand how to use EPD data.
- 56% expressed an awareness that they need to supplement their cattle during the fall and winter.
- 88% said that the herd health discussion assisted them in better understanding a herd health vaccination program.
- 88% became aware of marketing alternatives.

### **Attitudes/Aspirations Changed (Producers' Intent to Make Management Changes)**

- 79% of the respondents said they will use EPD material when selecting herd sires.
- 53% attending said they will change their current supplementation program.
- 81% will investigate different marketing possibilities.

## Economic Impact

As a result of this program, approximately 10 producers have made a practice change and formed a beef marketing cooperative. This year this cooperative sorted and sold 850 head (average weight 510 lbs) of calves at \$.08- \$.10 per hundredweight above the current local market price for a premium above local market price of about \$50/head. Group marketing increased producer returns by approximately \$42,500.00.

## Conclusions

This program will now be offered annually due to the success of the first year and will be open to new attendees as well as past graduates. Future topics will be based upon recommendations from the post evaluation and the livestock advisory committee.

The Extension agent is currently working on a management plan for the beef cooperative that includes vaccination calendars, forage rotations, shorter breeding cycles, and genetic selection of herd bulls. These tools will be delivered to current and prospective members of the beef cooperative as guidelines for their management practices.

Through Extension programming like the Master Cattlemen Program, beef producers are provided the latest research information available to improve the quality of their beef herd through intensive management-based education. This program demonstrates that Extension education focused on clientele needs can result in significant economic impact that helps to answer accountability questions faced by Cooperative Extension.

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