

VCCP Winter Classic draws best of the best

by Jennifer Showalter

HARRISONBURG, VA — Being the biggest jackpot show on the East coast, the 2013 VCCP Winter Classic recently drew some of the most elite cattle and exhibitors to the Rockingham County Fairgrounds for a weekend full of stiff competition. With 520 entries and 254 exhibitors from 11 different states, the cool winter temperatures did not stop the 2013 VCCP Winter Classic from being the happening place.

Before getting down to the heat of things, a crowd of youth and adults gathered for a Stock Show University conducted by John Sullivan with Sullivan Supply. From animal selection, showmanship, feeding, daily hair and animal care, to show day grooming and clipping, Sullivan focused on ways to achieve the championship look that every exhibitor wants.

"The clinic is always well received, as John is a pioneer in the industry and started Sullivan Show Supply. He works so well with the kids. He handed out a t-shirt to all exhibitors. We are really humbled by his willingness to come in and put on this clinic for us. He is a great guy," said VCCP member Neal Buchanan.

With everyone anxious to get the show underway, VCCP members proudly presented three "Winter Classic" scholarships before the first class entered the ring. With the future of agriculture in mind, Stephen Michael Cropp won the top honors and will receive a \$1,000 directly paid to the college or trade school of his choice upon admission. Connor Orrock and Cody Rice were the runner-ups and each will receive a \$500 scholarship to the college or trade school of their choice.

Dr. Scott Greiner with the Department of Animal and Poultry Sciences at Virginia Tech had the rewarding but challenging job of sorting through all the classes. After

working through all the breed classes, Greiner chose Caleb Potter's champion cross bred heifer as the overall champion heifer. Potter was presented a check for \$750. Melinda Boyd's champion Shorthorn heifer came back in the ring to be named the overall reserve champion heifer. Boyd was presented a check for \$500. Robert Nixon's champion Angus female was selected as the third overall heifer, and he was presented a check for \$150. The fourth overall heifer went to Melissa Grimmel with her champion Hereford heifer. She was presented a check for \$100. Alexis Wright's champion Maine heifer came back in to place fifth overall. Wright received a \$75 check.

The steer show was similar to the heifer show in that Greiner worked his way through all of the breed shows before pulling the top steers back in for the final lineup. Elizabeth Heintz's AOB-Maine steer was selected as the overall grand champion steer. She was presented a check for \$1,000. The next four steers in line came out of the cross bred show. Madison Jones exhibited the reserve grand champion steer and received \$750. Elizabeth Heintz also exhibited the third overall steer and was presented an additional check for \$150. The fourth overall steer was exhibited by Jena Sigel. She accepted a check for \$100. Brittany Truax exhibited the fifth overall steer and received a check for \$75.

Exhibitors who had purchases heifers and steers in the VCCP 2012 Best of the Valley Club Calf Sale had the opportunity to compete in classes designated specifically for them with additional premiums. Chad Barnett exhibited the champion VCCP heifer and received a check for \$750. Summer Patterson stood next in line with the reserve champion VCCP heifer and was presented a \$500 check. Evan Vonada exhibited the champion VCCP steer and was pre-

sented a check for \$1,000. No stranger to the champion lineup, Chad Barnett followed with the reserve champion VCCP steer and was awarded a check for \$750.

"The show went real well! We probably had the best set of cattle from top to bottom that has been through our show to date. I think overall, it was probably the best show we have had. VCCP members strive to make the Winter Classic another outlet for exhibitors to go show their animals during a down time in the show year calendar. We started this show and sale for our youth, as they are the future. We also wanted to prove that one does not have to go to the Midwest to find a quality show and sale. We've been told by several industry leaders that our event will rank with any of the jackpot shows. We are

also proud of the fact that before the show even begins, the exhibitors receive prizes and merchandise valued at what they pay for their entry fees. We pride ourselves that we give more back to the exhibitors than most shows," said Buchanan.

The Eastern Elite Production Sale was also held in conjunction with the VCCP Winter Classic Show. Featuring some of the country's top purebred cattle, show cattle, and club calf cattle genetics, the sale drew a lot of attention. A mix of 93 lots of embryos, bulls, cows, bred heifers and open heifers averaged \$2,950. The top selling lot was consigned by Brad Kierns and sold to JMK Cattle for \$6,000.

For more information on the 2013 VCCP Winter Classic and The Eastern Elite Production Sale visit www.virginiacalfclubproducers.com.



Caleb Potter exhibits the overall champion heifer at the 2013 VCCP Winter Classic and is presented a check for \$750.

Photos by Jennifer Showalter



Melissa Grimmel of Maryland keeps a close eye on the judge as she shows at the VCCP Winter Classic.



Kaylee Shelton of Maryland competes with the big boys and girls at the 2013 VCCP Winter Classic.

Father-daughter ranching team transitions to organic supplier

by Karl H. Kazaks

KINGS MOUNTAIN, NC — She's only been raising cattle full-time a mere four years, but Shelley Proffitt Eagan is just as much a cattleman as any good ol' boy. What's more, she's grown Proffitt Family Farms from a shoestring foray into a supplier of organic beef for one of the nation's largest retail grocery chains: Whole Foods.

It started in 2008 when Eagan, her husband Brian, and their two children Dewi and Zoe moved from Colorado to her family's farm about 30 miles outside of Charlotte.

Her father, Steve Proffitt, had been raising cattle for years, keeping stockers and cows and calves. He wasn't satisfied with either approach. "I wanted to have a connection with the animals all the way to the end," he said.

He had converted to managed grazing, had switched his herd to registered Angus from Wye Plantation bloodlines, and had a crop of yearling calves he was looking to sell to someone who had a market for grass-fed beef. He was also transitioning the farm to organic production.

With Eagan back home, unable to find a new teaching job (her previous profession) they decided to try selling beeves themselves. They found a custom slaughterhouse in Taylorsville — Mays Meats — and sent off an animal to be butchered.

About two weeks later Eagan showed up at the Charlotte Regional Farmers Market one Saturday. She didn't know what to expect.

"People were so excited to see me," she said. The local foods movement was really picking up steam in the Charlotte area and there was ample demand at the market for grass-fed beef.

Initial customers became repeat customers. New customers heard the good word about what Eagan had to offer. Before long people were waiting 10 deep in line to buy Proffitt Family Farms beef.

"It went from zero to 60 like that," Eagan said. "The demand was immediate."

Within a month, Eagan decided to advance sell their meat. She took email addresses and each week sent out a pre-order form. That change allowed late-arriving customers at the market to have the opportunity to take home better cuts of meat.

By that fall, "the phone was ringing off the hook," said Eagan. They were slaughter-

ing one or two animals a week and demand was outstripping supply.

Within two years, the family was hauling two vehicles full of meat to the market each weekend, was accepting credit cards, and had hired retail staff. They also had an email list with 2500 names and were operating a farm store on Fridays.

Running this quickly-expanding business meant Eagan's life was much more complicated than just helping her father take care of cattle (which is what she really likes to do). There were the logistics of preparing for market, the work of inventorying over 40 different cuts of meat every week, and the marketing effort. "You spend more time selling and managing than you do as a farmer," Eagan said.

The new revenue source also required a different approach to farm management.

"We realized pretty quickly you can't go out of business for six months a year," she said. "Your customers expect you to be there year-round."

To have product available year-round required some adjustments and careful planning but today the herd calves year-round. "There's always someone who needs to be weaned, someone who needs to be castrated and tagged," Eagan said.

While the farm currently has about 80 cows, with some 750 acres of owned and rented grassland, Eagan and Proffitt could keep 120 cows on their current land base.

However, at present the farm operates a closed herd because of another significant management change that has occurred under Eagan's watch: the transition to certified organic.

Because Proffitt was already managing his ground as organic, they were able to have some of their pastures certified organic in the fall of 2009 and the remainder in 2010. About two years later, they were able to have their cattle herd certified organic as well.

Attaining certified organic status was particularly important for Eagan. She knew there were customers who would pay a premium to know their food was raised and slaughtered in a manner that meets the program's strict guidelines. "If you see that stamp," she said, "you know it's not just my word."

Being organic has a unique

set of challenges. There's not a robust organic hay market in the Old North State, for example.

In addition to being grass-fed and certified organic, the farm's beef is also GAP (Global Animal Partnership) certified and Animal Welfare Approved. Those designations attest to how the farm's animals are raised, which is important to Whole Foods and its customers.

Today all of Eagan's production is contracted to a Whole Foods store which opened in Charlotte last summer.

Eagan said she is pleased with her new marketing arrangement. Gone are the countless hours of managing a small, direct-market retail operation — leaving her time to farm.

Agreeing to supply Whole Foods organic beef meant that the slaughterhouse which processes their animals also has to be certified organic. Luckily Mays Meats was willing to undertake that process and agree to certain requirements. For example, the organic beef from Proffitt Family Farms has to be kept segregated. They cannot drink the same water as non-organic beef, and when hanging their carcasses cannot touch non-organic sides.

Whole Foods has to follow its own protocol for handling the organic beef.

"I feel like organic grass-fed beef will be a solid market for us for at least five years," Eagan said. There is consumer demand for it and commodity beef prices at their current high levels aren't pushing commercial producers to look at entering this niche market.

Part of her success, Eagan said, can be attributed to having a good processor and living within driving distance of a city "full of people who want our product." What's more, their beef has been as popular as it has, they believe, because Wye Plantation genetics make for good tasting beef when used with their grass-based management regime.

Proffitt recognizes his daughter for her role in the transformation of their farm operation and the subsequent successes.

"It would never have happened if she hadn't come back," he said. "I never could have expected it to grow like it's grown."

As beneficial as it has been for Proffitt Family Farms to switch to selling to Whole



With just four years of full-time farming experience, Shelley Proffitt has found a way to position her family's beef operation into a thriving business.

Photos by Karl H. Kazaks



Steve and Shelley Proffitt's organic, grass-fed beef operation is ideally located an easy drive from Charlotte.

Foods, it was hard for Shelley to say good-bye to her Saturday customers. "I really dreaded saying good-bye," she said.

She still sees them from

time to time, though. Every once in a while, she'll go to the market — see her friends, pick up some food, and see where it all began, just a few short years before.

Bunk Feed Management

by Stephen Wagner

If you surf the internet you won't find any shortage of information about bunk feed management for beef or dairy cattle. Much of the information comes from the Midwest — Ohio, Iowa and the Dakotas, university extensions, to be sure. What's more, the literature available on this topic, reflecting today's practices, has been out there for years, decades actually. The BMP involved here has turned many farmers into scientists simply because successful bunk feeding is an exacting process to the point where the individual animal's wants and needs have to be factored into the process as well as the herd food mentality.

Dr. Rob Pritchard, Professor of Animal Science at South Dakota State University was scheduled to speak at the 44th Cattle Feeder's Day in Lancaster, PA. One of those famed Dakota fogs, however, cancelled all flights for a day or so,

including the one Pritchard was supposed to take, so he wound up giving his presentation by phone. His visual presentation had been sent in advance and was synchronized by Penn State Extension Specialist John Comerford.

Dan Loy, an Extension Beef Specialist at Iowa State University, referenced Pritchard in a 1997 newsletter, Feedbunk Management, in explaining Pritchard's groundbreaking role. Pritchard, he wrote, "has developed a system, initially to simplify feed calls and feed bunk management for the many students responsible for these duties at his Beef Feedlot Research Center. What Dr. Pritchard discovered was that mid-western cattle feeders could improve their efficiency by using a systematic approach to feed bunk management and has developed a bunk scoring approach to teach his system."

"The dry matter a steer consumes in 24 hours," said Pritchard, "will

"My definition of feed bunk management is to deliver a consistent, nutritious, fresh ration in a manner that maximizes (or nearly maximizes) feed intake and minimizes waste and spoilage."

~Dan Loy

find that the biggest portion will be eaten in late afternoon or early evening. That's when they actually consume the most feed in a day." With that, Pritchard called attention to a slide that tracked the feedings. Ohio State University Extension's Beef Information offers a Feedlot Management Primer which nearly parrots Pritchard's method. "Cattle feeders," it says, "should strive to have uniform day to day consumption of fresh, high-quality feed...Careful bunk management during the winter months when ice, snow and freezing rain are a problem is especially important since weather conditions alter consumption patterns."

"A bunk sheet should have a place for date, pen of cattle, amount of feed delivered and a bunk score. A feeder should have at least 4 days of records whenever determining how much feed to put in the bunk. Scoring bunks should be done the same time each day. Looking back, the bunk score, combined with the amount of feed provided can tell you if intakes are going up, coming down or holding steady. Scores constantly in the 2 to 3 range may lead to feed wastage and reduced feed efficiency due to the possibility of large fluctuations in feed intake.

"One method of monitoring intake," according to OSE, "and determining how much to feed is to use a feedbunk-scoring system on a scale from zero to five. A score of zero implies that the feedbunk is empty or "slick". A score of zero-minus (0-) means the bunk has been empty for more than an hour. A score of zero-plus (0+) means the bunk is empty except for a few fines or clumps of feed. A score of one means something less than or equal to one inch of feed is left in the bottom of the bunk. A score of 2 means 2 inches of feed is left. Three means three inches and so on. Normally, if the score is zero for two consecutive days, increase the feed delivered to cattle by 5-10 percent. If the score is two or more, reduce the feed offered by 5-10 percent."

Pritchard is nearly fanatical about cow flop observation because it tells the story of what is going on in the ruminant digestive system. Ohio State University Extension explains

it this way: "Tall firm stools are a sign the cattle are consuming significant levels of roughage. Flat brown stools indicate that the cattle are consuming higher amounts of grain but are not incurring digestive upsets. Flat gray stools are a sign of acidosis. Flat gray stools may be observed before an actual drop in intake occurs. Pens that have a majority of flat brown stools and a few gray stools are a sign that cattle are optimizing intake."

"We were trying to keep the pounds of corn that they would eat each day really smooth," Pritchard adds. "I didn't want the cattle to learn to eat a lot of roughage, then step to a lower roughage diet because they'll try to do as much eating as they did before. We're looking for things to be the same from one day to the next.

"We don't do anything to stimulate their appetites," Pritchard concluded. "When they aren't eating as much as we want we've done something that hurt their appetite. If we make a change and the cattle start eating more, it's because we got rid of that signal. It isn't that we did something proactive that created higher intake. We got rid of the signal that was telling them not to eat as much."

"My definition of feed bunk management," said Loy, "is to deliver a consistent, nutritious, fresh ration in a manner that maximizes (or nearly maximizes) feed intake and minimizes waste and spoilage. Therefore feed bunk management includes not only feed delivery decisions, but also feed mixing, nutrient balancing, feedstuff quality control and characteristics, feed processing, and other factors related to feed presentation. Feed delivery decisions are essentially an estimate of the amount of feed a pen of cattle will consume. Factors such as cattle size, weight, breed, ration, weather effects and health must all be taken into account. Also the effect of a given feed intake on intake at subsequent feedings must be accounted for. For example, cattle may consume the feeding just after an increase, but lose appetite and crash a day or two later. This is the classic mistake that sets the stage for roller coaster consumption pattern."

**Cover photo courtesy of Jennifer Showalter
Caught in the moment! Madison Jones is in the zone as she competes in the 2013 VCCP Winter Classic.**

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Publisher, PresidentFrederick W. Lee, 518-673-0134
V.P., ProductionMark W. Lee, 518-673-0132 mlee@leepub.com
V.P., General ManagerBruce Button, 518-673-0104 bbutton@leepub.com
Managing Editor.....Joan Kark-Wren, 518-673-0141 jkarkwren@leepub.com
Editorial AssistantEmily Enger, 518-673-0145 eenger@leepub.com
Page CompositionMichelle Gressler, 518-673-0138 mmykel@leepub.com
ComptrollerRobert Moyer, 518-673-0148 bmoyer@leepub.com
Production Coordinator.....Jessica Mackay, 518-673-0137 jmackay@leepub.com
Classified Ad ManagerPeggy Patrei, 518-673-0111 classified@leepub.com
Shop ForemanHarry Delong
Palatine Bridge, Front desk518-673-0160 Web site: www.leepub.com
Accounting/Billing Office518-673-0149 amoyer@leepub.com
Subscriptions888-596-5329 subscriptions@leepub.com

Send all correspondence to:

PO Box 121, Palatine Bridge, NY 13428 • Fax 518-673-2381

Editorial email: jkarkwren@leepub.com

Advertising email: jmackay@leepub.com

AD SALES REPRESENTATIVES

Bruce Button, Corporate Sales Mgr. 518-673-0104 bbutton@leepub.com
Kegley Baumgardner (Northern VA & MD) . . 540-255-9112 (cell) kegleyb@va.net
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