

# Building better beef

## Co-op cattle feeds benefit from CRF animal nutrition research

By Chris Villines

Tennessee Farmers Cooperative beef nutritionist Royce Towns is direct when discussing his approach to formulating feeds and making recommendations to cattle producers.

“It’s all based on science,” says Towns, a 26-year TFC staffer. “Facts are facts.”

That science supports the beef research he and others are conducting on behalf of Cooperative Research Farms (CRF), the world’s largest animal nutrition and management research association. While this research-driven approach often provides clear, black-and-white results, CRF’s work is ultimately aimed at another color — green.

“Most everything we do focuses on increasing the cow’s efficiency,” Towns says. “By making the cattle more efficient, it can help put more money in producers’ pockets.”

Owned by TFC and six other member organizations, CRF was founded in 1954 and has con-

ducted several hundred large-scale beef research trials since 1960. The goal of these studies is to develop marketable products that increase feed sales and enhance the ability of beef producers to compete in the food industry. Towns, who serves on both CRF’s beef research team and communications committee, says the findings derived from these studies are crucial elements in the continued evolution of Co-op’s cattle nutrition products.

“A lot of the technology incorporated into Co-op cattle feeds has come from CRF research,” says Towns. “We’ve looked at the nutrient requirements for incoming feeder cattle, the associative effects of forage supplements, and intake

limiting methods. The work of the CRF beef research team has been instrumental in the development of rumen-friendly feeds and supplements that improve digestion and function without hindering forage digestibility.”

Together, the CRF members — TFC, Southern States, Co-op Atlantic, Federated Co-operatives Limited, La Coop fédérée, InVivo Animal Nutrition and Health, and Kalmbach Feeds, Inc. — have created an impactful beef research program utilizing universities and private research facilities throughout the process, explains Towns.

“With CRF, each beef research team member can steer research toward areas that are of importance to us,” he stresses. “If there’s a consensus that conducting a particular trial is a good idea, we do it. It

allows you to address specific needs and areas for gain in your given markets. To me, that’s an

advantage.”

CRF beef research is concentrated in four specific areas of production and management: cow/calf, stocker/backgrounding, finishing, and dairy-beef and veal.

“We’re always looking at what we’ve done in the past and where we need to go for the future,” says Towns. “The beef research team has conference calls each month, and twice a year all of the CRF research teams get together to present our research results in scientific format. That’s helpful because you can evaluate everything your team has been doing and sometimes find ways to overlap your research with that of other teams.”

Among several highlights of



Data collected from Cooperative Research Farms’ beef research team helps producers get the most efficiency out of their cattle, like these at Mark Barnett’s farm in Montgomery County.

the work done by CRF’s beef research team are:

- Supplements that support better daily gain and feed efficiency for growing and finishing cattle;

- Intake limiter program for stocker cattle to support consistent gains and keep cattle on target to reach the desired weight at shipping deadlines;

- Evaluation of the use of chromium as a nutrition supplement and its impact on brood cow body condition scores, reproduction, calf survivability, and weaning weight;

- Assessing different fats as supplemental energy sources for brood cows and how these fats impact reproduction and body condition scores.

“What we strive to achieve with our research is finding ways to make cattle more efficient with every mouthful of grass they consume, whether it’s from supplements or minerals,” Towns says. “It’s all about helping producers get more gain, milk production, and reproductive efficiency out of their herds.”

“Beef cow/calf production is a reproductive game. If you don’t have calves to sell, you don’t have money coming in.”

In addition to his almost four years of involvement with the CRF beef research team, Towns also serves as the leader of the partnership organization’s communications committee.

“Our primary task with the communications committee is to find ways to help CRF mem-

bers market, implement, and utilize the technical information gathered from research in their home areas,” says Towns. “One of the best things about being on this committee is the sharing of ideas. We see each other’s brochures and marketing materials and talk about the various events we’re involved in.”

Towns adds that idea-sharing and studying additional methods of enhancing cattle efficiency never ends, citing ongoing CRF beef research team trials as an example.

“We continue to look at different things that can positively impact forage digestibility and help cattle get more energy and nutrients,” he says. “Another thing we’re researching right now is essential oils, or phytonutrients. Some European countries are using essential oils in place of antibiotics in their feeds.”

This kind of access to groundbreaking methods for continued beef cattle improvement makes CRF instrumental to Co-op’s feed products, says Towns.

“Being a part of CRF, where you have a meeting of the minds from several different feed manufacturers, has been very beneficial,” he says. “Even though our geographies, forages, and feedstuffs are different, you can gain a lot from seeing how everyone addresses their challenges. We’re always bouncing ideas off of each other. That’s what CRF is all about.”