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SNP panels: Will they be leading the beef industry forward?

Ames, IA, 11/17/2009 – Ever since the release of gene markers a few years ago, bull breeders have been anxious to use these tools to spring their breeding programs forward at a faster pace. But does the technology live up to the hype it's received?

“Most breeders have not had a good understanding of what these past gene markers were capable of doing,” said Daryl Strohbehn, beef specialist for the Iowa Beef Center with Iowa State University Extension. “Now bull breeders are trying to make important economic and genetic improvement decisions that involve the use of even more complicated genetic evaluations, which are coming from high-density SNP panels.”

A number of companies are competing today in the genomics arena, thus making it that much more challenging for bull breeders to decide which to use and how best to apply them to their breeding program.

“The application of these SNP panels comes into question when one tries to apply them across broad populations of breeding cattle, especially when some of them can be breed specific,” Strohbehn said. “Some producers are questioning whether they add enough to the accuracy of genetic predictions to make them worth the investment. And that is an important question to be answered by both bull breeders and their customers when young bulls are being purchased for use.”

These questions and topics closely tied to SNP panels will be addressed at an upcoming Iowa Beef Center Seedstock Conference being held in Ames, IA, on Dec. 10, 2009. Both Dr. Jim Reecy of Iowa State University and Dr. Darrah Bullock of the University of Kentucky will present information on beef cattle genomics and their incorporation into genetic predictions and selection programs.

Reecy has been at the forefront of the discovery and development of SNPs, which relates to various production traits in beef cattle. Bullock has been on the other side of the genetic equation, which is relating how to best utilize these informational tools in advancing bull breeding programs.

The Iowa Beef Seedstock Conference, “Applying Old Rules to New Technology Production” will be held in Ames, IA, at the Quality Inn, from 12:30-8:30 p.m. For more information on the conference, including a complete agenda and registration information, go to www.iowabeefcenter.org.

The Iowa Beef Center at Iowa State University in Ames, Iowa, was established in 1996 with the goal of supporting the growth and vitality of the state's beef cattle industry. It serves as the university's extension program to cattle producers and is comprised of faculty and staff from ISU Extension and the colleges of agriculture and life sciences and veterinary medicine. Together, the Iowa Beef Center's members work to develop and deliver the latest in research-based information regarding the beef cattle industry. For more information about the Iowa Beef Center, visit them online at www.iowabeefcenter.org or <http://blogs.extension.iastate.edu/iowabeef>.

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