

Working with Your University

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Take Home Message

Canadian and American Universities are a very useful source of general and specific information for cattle feeders. University research is primarily designed to answer the 'how' and 'why' questions which, must be answered if major advancements in productivity, quality, and profitability are to occur. The University has a unique role to play in educating our children and in providing trained personnel for the cattle feeding industry. Cattlemen can work with the university by communicating problems they are facing, giving constructive criticism, cooperating in practical on-farm research, and in providing support.

What Can the University Do for You?

The University as a source of information

Universities in Canada have traditionally concentrated on teaching and research since provincial departments of agriculture have had primary responsibility for extension activities. This does not mean, however, that cattle feeders should not expect to obtain useful and practical information from the University. Because staff are responsible for teaching, generally they will have a sound background in applied aspects of cattle production. Also, Universities have publication, books, computer software, information on the Internet, etc. which will be useful to cattle feeders. Staff often speak at producer meetings and the university sponsors meetings and short courses. Some University courses may also be taken as 'distance education' without physically attending the institution. Thus, although the University is not as accessible as a local beef specialist and the personnel have other responsibilities, it is a good source of general information for cattlemen.

Universities should be considered as one of the primary sources of information for specific and less common problems. Remember that University staff are involved in leading-edge research which is intended to provide you with answers to both today's and tomorrow's questions. They have

access to the scientific journals where the latest research is published. Researchers also have a good network of other scientists who may have the answer to your problem. Finally, researchers attend national and international meetings where the latest research is presented and problems and theories are discussed.

The University as a place for research

Research is vital to the competitiveness of the cattle industry. Can you imagine how successful our industry would be in competing in the international marketplace if no Canadian research was conducted over the next 20 years? Universities have been, and will continue to be, one of the primary sites for Canadian beef research. Professors must have keen interest in research otherwise they will not survive in the competitive University system. In addition, the top students from around the world are selected for graduate training and their young and eager minds make a tremendous contribution to research in the beef cattle industry.

University researchers are not just involved in answering today's questions with applied research programs, they are examining the future as well. They are also engaged in basic research which is designed to answer the questions of why things are the way they are. It is only when we understand the 'why' questions and how things work that real advancements in productivity, quality, and profitability can occur. It is essential that such research be continued at Universities and similar institutions since on-farm research by its very nature is applied and will not result in the creation of major new technologies for the beef cattle industry.

The University as a source of production specialists and scientists

Universities have had and will continue to have a unique role in training of production specialists, extension agents, educators, and researchers. Such people are essential for the future of the cattle feeding industry.

The University as a place to educate our children

Young people who want to be involved in the cattle industry should seriously consider attending a University. Students normally spend four years in undergraduate programs studying the basic arts and sciences, current agricultural techniques, and information in newer disciplines such as molecular biology and computer modelling before obtaining a Bachelor of Science degree in Agriculture. After graduation some students choose to enter a graduate program where

they normally spend a little less than two years in obtaining and Masters (MSc) degree while learning more general information as well as researching a particular problem. A minimum of an additional three years of study and research is required to obtain a doctorate (PhD) degree.

What you can do for your University

It is important that you work closely with your local University personnel to obtain what you can from them but also so that you can make a contribution to your industry through the University. If you keep communication lines open you will encourage researchers to spend more time on problems which are of concern to you and your fellow producers. A side benefit is that University personnel will develop a better appreciation for your operation and may well design research projects or specific management and production techniques to address your particular concerns. Good communication is therefore mutually beneficial.

The importance of on-site research in terms of development of new feeding and management procedures and rapid adoption of new technologies and management techniques at the feedlot level cannot be overemphasized. More University research is now being done with cooperating livestock producers since this reduces the cost of research and the results may be more applicable to commercial operations. Also, the demonstration of results 'on farm' generally means that the information will be picked up more quickly by other producers. You can assist University personnel by providing your expertise and facilities for such research. In turn, because of their experience, University personnel can assist you in applying for research money, in deciding on which questions need to be researched for your particular operation, and in setting up and interpreting research projects.

Your individual support for the University is essential. Recognize the importance of its teaching, training, and research activities to you and for the advancement of your industry. Support it as much as you can politically, financially, and verbally. Public institutions need such support now more than ever.

Finally, if you feel that you cannot support the University the way it is because of real or perceived problems, then work to change it by offering constructive criticism. It is too important to you and your industry to simply ignore.

University Personnel

Personnel involved in beef research at Canadian Universities are listed below. Cattlemen should not limit themselves to Canadian institutions, however, since Universities in United States and other countries also have much to offer.

Table 1. Staff involved in Beef Cattle Research at Various Canadian Universities

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Clandinin, Tom	492-5188	tom.clandin@ualberta.ca	Nutrition
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 Virology, vaccines
 Immunology, vaccines
 Virology, vaccines

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