Educational Delivery Methods

- Peer-to-peer working groups were offered to advanced beef cattle producers in 2016-2017 and again in 2018-2019 as part of the TN Valley Systems 360° Working Group.
- Farmer meetings were conducted on producer farms or at Auburn University affiliated research stations and demonstration sites, and were selected to highlight best management practices for a given topic area.
- Extension agents and specialists facilitated peer-to-peer learning and discussion through demonstrations with producers on topics related to value-added calf management and marketing, watering systems, current fencing technologies, animal handling facilities, and grazing systems.
- A follow-up survey was sent to program participants (n = 25; 60% response rate) one year after the program conclusion to evaluate potential adoption and knowledge change associated with participation in the Systems 360° Working Group Program.

Results - Adoption of Best Management Practices

- Participants reported adoption of the following practices related to forages, fencing, and watering systems in beef operations:
  - 28% increase in adoption of watering system use by participants
  - 60% reported they have planted cool-season annuals as a result of participating in this program and there was a 10% improvement in grazing management practices
  - 73% have increased their usage of electric fencing (either permanent or temporary form)

- Cattle producers indicated that they had adopted practices related to herd and feeder calf management including:
  - 26% of participants have used freeze-branding for cattle identification
  - 73% indicated they have made improvements to their cattle handling facilities
  - 20% reported they have implemented a vaccination protocol as part of a weaning program for feeder calves
  - 20% reported that they had changed their marketing strategy for their calves, including movement towards retained ownership of calves through the feedyard, direct marketing of calves to an order-buyer, or direct marketing calves for freezer beef

Producer Testimonials: Participants reported that this program “helped add value to my calves and put more dollars in my pocket” and that “this was the most practical, informative program I have ever attended”. Producers view the working group format as a method to continue their education, and indicated that they “benefit from seeing recommended practices in use in a real-world setting.”

Conclusions

Results of this program indicate that a farmer-focused discussion group is an effective method for improving the understanding of beef production systems and enhances on-farm adoption of beef herd management practices.