

## Introduction

In 2020, the Alabama Cooperative Extension System Animal Science and Forage Team conducted a web-based survey to gather feedback from Systems 360° working group participants regarding their use of information provided by this program. A working group is defined as a farmer-to-farmer network focused on a common theme or series of topics of interest. This program was developed in response to the need for more advanced educational programming at the beef-forage interface and the intended audience was beef farmers with more than 10 years of experience in the industry.

The objective of this survey was to determine potential on-farm adoption and knowledge change as a result of beef cattle producer participation in the Tennessee Valley Systems 360° Working Group.

## 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.



## Hands-On Education for Beef Producers



## 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.**

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