



HOW DATA WILL DRIVE THE BEEF INDUSTRY

It's the biggest opportunity on the horizon for beef improvement

If you watch professional sports, you will hear the word analytics used often. That's the science of using data to track athletic performance. Player statistics, once casual terms used mainly by announcers interpreting the game, have moved into the business side. Teams use data to strategize business development, select athletes and determine how they are rewarded.

In many ways that is the future of data in agriculture. The ability to collect and move information has grown exponentially. But the biggest change on the horizon is the ability to interpret that data for decision-making and make that knowledge seamlessly available to more people.

In Canada's beef industry one of the most innovative front-line players is the Beef InfoXChange System (BIXS).

BIXS is a database and web application to assist in the capture and exchange of economically beneficial individual animal and carcass data across the Canadian beef supply chain. With the new emphasis on data, BIXS now hovers on the edge of a revolution for industry management.

SHARING DRIVES PROGRESS

The anchor part of the BIXS industry model is information sharing.

The industry has long understood the potential to capture and exchange economically beneficial individual animal data, says Deborah Wilson, senior vice-president for BIXS. "We deliver that data to benefit the entire supply chain by improving communications and sharing across the entire beef chain."

Here are the key things she believes producers should watch on the BIXS and data front.

Understanding the economic value of data. "Imagine if we could eliminate the bottom 10 or 20 per cent of worst-producing animals in a lot of different categories," says Wilson.

"Think genomics, if we could track animals with superior carcass quality. What would that mean to packers to have better cutability, better marbling or more predictability? What if we age verified and could show some animals finish months earlier than others? That's less feed, less carbon footprint and many associated economic benefits.

"Once you start really looking at data objectively, you understand the power it brings," she says. "And it applies to small herds as well as large."



Many producers keep effective records and BIXS can transfer info to help tell the beef story.

Building marketing advantages. There are real potential benefits to the individual producer to communicate, build business opportunities and hone marketing programs. Feedlots may be willing to bid more actively for animals that come with a birth report. And packers can improve market intelligence and capitalize on deeper post-slaughter analytics.

Positioning sustainability. Food industry players are looking for ways to prove sustainability and producers are feeling pressure to meet obligations. Data management can help.

Adding new partners. As interest in data management grows, companies and others in industry are getting on board. BIXS is building a strong partnership base which will add value to all players, says Wilson.

Learn from the best. "While part of the beef industry has made real progress with data, the fact is beef is behind other industries," says Wilson, "and we have to learn from others. Dairy is a good example of using data to improve animal and industry performance."

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