

Increasing Agricultural Profitability and Sustainability Livestock Specialist

State Need:

- As a result of the 2003 special session budget reduction, a livestock specialist position has been left open since early FY 03.
- The Montana livestock industry continues to place a high priority on this position, requesting that the position be refilled and located at the Ag Research Center in Miles City.

Market Reality:

- Cattle and calves account for approximately one-half of Montana's agricultural income - approximately \$1 billion dollars.
- Increased educational assistance could significantly help to further improve this industry by enhancing reproductive efficiency, food safety and animal identification of non-productive animals.

Current Problem:

The U.S. beef industry is changing rapidly – driven by consumer concerns regarding food safety and dynamic global markets. Examples follow:

- Proposed national animal identification program which will require the identification of 2 million head of Montana cattle.
- A national emphasis on determining the incidence of BSE in Montana and national beef cattle herd by implementing biosecurity programs.
- An emphasis on pre-harvest food safety by the rancher in reducing the incidence of E. coli, salmonella, campylobacter and, potentially, BSE.
- Education of Montana livestock producers in Beef Quality Assurance.
- Helping Montana producers tailor beef genetics and management to meet specific markets.
- Helping Montana producers minimize reproductive failure in the breeding cow herd.

Proposed Solution:

- Fill livestock specialist position located at Ag Research Center in Miles City, Montana.

Required Investment:

- FY 06 - \$82,000 (salary, benefits and operations)
- FY 07 - \$82,000 (salary, benefits and operations)
- The Beef Network is a partnership between the livestock industry and MSU.

Return on Investment:

- There is the potential to improve calf weaning weights by 50 lbs. if more calves were born earlier in the calving season. This improvement is conservatively worth \$36 million dollars in additional gross revenue if calves are worth \$.90/lb. at weaning in the fall.
- If management programs were in place, the value of cull beef cows could be increased by \$150/head if fed to achieve 300 lbs. of additional gain before sale. These are called “white-fat” cows and are in demand for lower end steak house entrees.
- Appropriate winter feeding protocols have been shown to decrease feed costs by as much as \$6,000- \$20,000/ranch.

Selected Examples of Return:

- This is a critical position in the MSU Extension program. This is the only specialist located in eastern Montana devoted exclusively to livestock extension.
- Not only are educational programs necessary in livestock management for eastern Montana livestock producers, this individual also serves as a resource for USDA-ARS at Ft. Keogh, NRCS employees, Montana Stockgrowers, Farm Bureau and local county livestock committees.
- This position is a partnership between MSU Extension and USDA-ARS-LARRL, with the federal station contributing significant resources in support of the position.
- The position will be work with on-going partnerships between MSU and the livestock industry such as the Montana Beef Network.