

How it Works: The University of Tennessee Institute of Agriculture (Part II)

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Last month's article began a two-part miniseries within the "How it Works" series. It talked about how telling your story has been the emphasis of many who advocate for beef cattle producers across the country. Those that play a support role in beef cattle production also need to tell their story. Not just to the general public, but starting with the producers they serve. Please go back to last month's article to take a running start at this one.

The University of Tennessee Institute of Agriculture (UTIA) partners with several non-profit organizations to reach its goals. Specifically for beef cattle production, a great example is the partnership between UT Extension and the Tennessee Cattlemen's Association. These articles from UT Extension Specialists that have appeared in the Tennessee Cattle Business magazine for many years show the degree of cooperation. A faculty member from the UT Department of Animal Science is also allowed an Ex Officio seat on the TCA board. This relationship with members of TCA is extremely important for guiding research and extension efforts; making sure that those efforts focus on the real needs of cattle producers.

Many UT Extension County Agents play a vital role in the organization and maintenance of county Cattlemen's and/or Livestock Associations. Just like the cooperation between TCA and UT Extension Specialists, these relationships in counties across the state are vital for directing the focus of Agents' local educational programs. It is no coincidence that these two groups resemble each other in design - a grass-roots base that guides the state organization. That similarity dates back to the early development of what is now a vibrant and influential state association.

Another long-lasting and fruitful partnership maintained by UTIA is with the Tennessee Department of Agriculture (TDA). A great example of the partnership between TDA and UT Extension is the use of the Master Beef Producer and Advanced Master Beef Producer programs as the educational component of the Tennessee Agriculture Enhancement Program (TAEP). This differentiates TAEP from other cost share programs while promoting the educational efforts of UTIA, leading to an improvement in the quality of feeder cattle raised in the state of Tennessee that has been noted by cattle feeders across the country.

There are numerous examples of grants from TDA to UTIA that support field research and/or demonstration. Water quality research, mortality disposal, local beef market development and drought mitigation are just a few of the projects for which TDA has provided funding. These projects lead to information that fulfill the mission of UTIA. A more recent example is TDA's funding of the Tennessee Beef Heifer Development program under the Grow the Herd initiative. That program will help make sure that, as the TN beef herd grows, it will grow with more reproductively sound and economically productive replacement females.

The University of Tennessee, even beyond the Institute of Agriculture, enjoys a close and productive partnership with the Tennessee Farm Bureau Federation (TFBF). Again, the county-

based model shared by both TFBF and UT Extension is not a mere coincidence. The first Tennessee Farm Bureau office was located “in one corner of the county agent’s office in the basement of the courthouse in Columbia” (Joe Frank Porter, TFBF Pres. 1921-1946: *The History of Tennessee Farm Bureau Federation*). Prior to that, W.A. Schofield, Director of Extension in Tennessee, was a delegate in the formation of the American Farm Bureau.

The Chancellor of UTIA, currently Dr. Larry Arrington, sits as an Advisory Director on the TFBF Board of Directors. Several UT Extension Specialists and Agents, as well as faculty with UT AgResearch appointments, attend Farm Bureau policy development meetings across the state to provide input about current issues in production agriculture and to keep themselves informed about issues that impact the producers served by UTIA. Again, the bond between Tennessee Farm Bureau Federation and UTIA has been strengthened over many years of working together toward the same goal of improving life for Tennessee farmers.

Research and education programs lead by UTIA are also sometimes supported by industry partners that offer products or services. This type of partner is often a producer-owned cooperative. For instance, the Tennessee Farmers Cooperative has partnered with UTIA to support on-farm demonstrations and educational efforts (including the previously mentioned Heifer Development program) while also providing feedback from their producer base. In fact, the TN Farmers Cooperative was established as a result of “a special committee appointed by the TFBF and under the leadership of Al Jerdan, a University of Tennessee marketing specialist” (*Tennessee Farmers Cooperative history and structure*).

In addition to these few examples, there are hundreds more partnerships that UTIA enjoys with state and federal governmental agencies and industry leaders. Many of those are specific to beef cattle production. To list them all would not be practical in this article. But, rest assured that each one is critical and immensely appreciated.

To wrap up “telling the story” of the University of Tennessee Institute of Agriculture; the impact of the Land-Grant mission has influenced almost every aspect of the beef cattle industry in Tennessee from delivering research-based education to helping shape the historical development of leading groups in advocacy, production supply and marketing. At the heart of that story is a group of scientists and educators, partnering with industry leaders, that have dedicated their careers to improving the lives and livelihoods of Tennessee farmers and families.