OSU Beef Industry Conference
(formerly Advanced Cattle Management Seminar)

Campus Coordinating Committee
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This paper begins with a brief history of the long-running, well-received Advanced Cattle Management Seminar at Oklahoma State University (OSU), changes which occurred since instituting the seminar, and reasons for restructuring the seminar. The new program – the OSU Beef Industry Conference – is intended to keep the best of the former program and add features which enhance the program compared with its predecessor. This paper provides the guiding principles for the new OSU Beef Industry Conference.

Advanced Cattle Management Seminar
An initial meeting of four Oklahoma State University faculty members, two from Animal Science and two from Agricultural Economics in May 1986 led to what became the Advanced Cattle Management Seminar. The seminar began as an invitation-only, space-limited event oriented toward large-scale cattle operations in Oklahoma. Presentations were limited in number and sufficiently spaced to allow ample time for interaction between the speaker and audience. Presenters were expected to pay their travel expenses whenever possible. Many did, just to have an opportunity to speak to a group of large and influential cattlemen in Oklahoma. Speakers were told there would be no press or media coverage so they could freely speak their mind and address issues central to the industry without comments appearing in the trade press. Over the years, this no-media policy led to many spirited, candid discussions of industry issues and a hallmark of the seminar.

The first Advanced Cattle Management Seminar was held in July 1986. Its success led to a second one in March 1987 and annual seminars thereafter through 2005. Most were conducted in March, either on the OSU campus or in Stillwater at an off-campus site. In the early years, attendance nearly always reached the limit of the room where it was held (around 110 people) and some who wanted to attend were turned away. Those invited were told registration was on a first-come, first-serve basis. Planners consciously did not seek a larger room for fear of diluting the original intent of the seminar, i.e., to offer an opportunity for dialogue among the speaker and attendees.

Over the period 1987-2005, the Advanced Cattle Management Seminar featured numerous industry, academic, and government speakers and attendees regularly commented how much they enjoyed the seminar and its format. However, several factors led to declining attendance the past three years. Willard Sparks was a mainstay and highlight of the conference since its inception. Many came just to interact with Willard or to hear what Willard was forecasting for grain and livestock markets. Willard’s declining health and eventual death may have adversely influenced attendance at recent seminars.
Too, Don Gill was among the four faculty members who initiated the Advanced Cattle Management Seminar and was an instrumental planner and its hardest-working advocate for the program. His retirement in 2004 also likely adversely influenced attendance.

There were other factors as well. Many owners and managers of larger cattle operations over this time period retired or turned over their ranch or feedlot operation to family or others. The next generation of ranch and feedlot managers may not have reached our mailing list and may not have had the historical commitment to the seminar as their predecessors.

In more recent years, there has been increased reluctance by speakers to pay their own travel expenses and the cost of hosting the seminar increased. Budget limitations became a bigger concern and there was little margin for error without a reserve of funds from which to draw should the need arise.

These several factors combined, e.g., declining attendance, tight budgets, and mailing list problems, created the need to reexamine the seminar and its operation. Over time, the planning group changed also. As the planning group began assessing the Advanced Cattle Management Seminar, questions were raised relating to the focus of the seminar, how it fit with other educational programs offered by OSU and the industry, and the seminar’s role given increasingly more information being available via the Internet.

From that assessment came the proposal in this paper. We are building on and capturing the key features of the Advanced Cattle Management Seminar while instituting features intended to strengthen the new program. The result will be continuation of a conference similar to the Advanced Cattle Management Seminar and a continuation of its rich tradition and contribution to the beef industry in Oklahoma.

**OSU Beef Industry Conference**

*Name and Mission*

The OSU Beef Industry Conference will be a high quality, educational offering oriented toward larger cattle operators (whether seedstock, cow-calf, stocker, or feedlot) and beef industry leaders in Oklahoma to address issues and research of importance to beef businesses in the state.

*Planning and Advisory Committee*

An on-campus committee consisting of faculty from Animal Science and Agricultural Economics and possibly other departments will coordinate planning and will conduct Beef Industry Conferences. An advisory committee consisting of representatives from various segments of the beef industry will be formed to assist and advise the on-campus committee regarding program content, speakers, sponsors, and other relevant aspects of the Beef Industry Conference.

*Timing and Location*

A target date each year will be the first Thursday-Friday in April. We anticipate the conference will be on the OSU campus so as to take advantage of amenities such as the
Atherton Hotel, Conoco-Phillips Alumni Center, Ranchers Club Restaurant, and others. We plan to continue targeting attendance to a room of about 110, thus again making registration a first-come, first serve process.

**Target Audience**
The planning committee has identified a process of maintaining an updated mailing list. First, we will undertake a thorough review of our current mailing list and recent participants. We have developed a nomination form for area and county extension educators, previous participants, and industry organizations to use in proposing persons to add to our mailing list. The Oklahoma Cattlemen’s Association and county cattlemen’s groups will be encouraged to identify one or more representatives to attend each Beef Industry Conference. If necessary, we will limit participation to so many per cattle operation, per industry organization, and per sponsoring organization, depending on total registrations and available space.

**Program Structure**
The Beef Industry Conference will retain the Thursday afternoon, Thursday evening, and Friday morning format. We plan to retain two popular program components of previous Advanced Cattle Management Seminars, a macroeconomics outlook and a livestock outlook. Other core features of the program will address national and state issues and OSU research, extension, or teaching updates. Breakout sessions are planned for specific topics of interest to cow-calf, stocker, and feedlot segments of the industry. In keeping with the original intent of the Advanced Cattle Management Seminar, we will allow ample time for audience discussion and interaction following each major speaker and will not allow media coverage of speaker comments during the conference.

As before, there will be an industry-sponsored social and dinner, ideally a Ranchers Club prime rib or steak dinner, and usual break refreshments. Unlike past years, a group breakfast with a speaker is being considered.

**Industry Support**
The on-campus committee has long recognized the need to bolster the financial underpinning of the Advanced Cattle Management Seminar. That becomes more critical with new features of the Beef Industry Conference. Previously, industry firms were approached to provide financial support for the social, and occasionally for break refreshments, speaker expenses, or dinner. We anticipate giving industry firms the opportunity to support specific components of the conference (Speaker expenses paid by …, Social refreshments donated by …, Dinner provided by …) or contribute generally to the conference at various levels (possibly Prime, Certified, Choice levels). We plan to recognize sponsors by introducing their representatives, with tripod/easel posters, and in printed program material.

**Summary**
Several people contributed to making the Advanced Cattle Management Seminar one of the premier educational events in Oklahoma for nearly two decades. On-campus planners wish to ensure the OSU Beef Industry Conference continues that history. As always, past
support, and anticipated future support from industry representatives is greatly appreciated. The beef industry in Oklahoma is better as a result of our mutual efforts. If you have comments, questions, or suggestions, contact anyone on the planning committee.

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