



Scan here to  
visit our beef  
extension  
webpage!

# Farmer-to-Farmer Working Groups for Improving Beef Cattle Management in Alabama

Mullenix, M.K.\* and G.L. Thompson<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Auburn University/Alabama Cooperative Extension System, Auburn, AL

## Introduction

In 2016, the Alabama Cooperative Extension System Animal Science and Forage Team facilitated the development of a farmer-based working group for beef producers in North Alabama. 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 program was to demonstrate sustainable land, animal, and economic management practices in beef cattle operations through on-farm learning experiences.

## Educational Delivery Methods

- A series of five meetings were organized to highlight technologies and strategies for agronomic, animal, and economic best practices in beef cattle operations.
- Farmer meetings were located on-farm or at Auburn University affiliated research stations and demonstration sites and offered from August 2016 through April 2017.
- Topics included: value-added calf marketing, bull selection/genetics, precision soil sampling, dealing with tall fescue toxicosis, rotational grazing, bale grazing, and water quantity/quality dynamics in grazed ecosystems.
- Extension agents and specialists facilitated **peer-to-peer learning** and discussion through demonstrations with producers on these topics to showcase their application in field settings.



Farm tours  
and  
application  
of  
discussion  
topics



Hands-On  
Learning



Extension-  
facilitated  
discussion  
on improving  
management

Program Educational Model

## Economic Impact and Adoption

### On-Farm Practices Adopted from Working Group Discussions

- Working towards more than 300 days of grazing per year
- Precision soil sampling
- Rotational stocking and bale grazing
- Improved calf marketing

### Producer Testimonial:

One participant indicated that he saved more than \$3,500 this year in fertilizer from the adoption of precision soil sampling in pastures and hayfields.

Participants reported an average **economic impact of \$2,500** per operation from this program.



## Results and Conclusions

- Following the completion of the program in April, participants indicated that they were **highly satisfied with the delivery method** and practices shared during the discussion sessions.
- **100% of participants** planned to implement one or more management practices discussed on their farm in the next 12 months.
- 62% of the participants reported that they learned the most from holding discussion groups on a given topic at **on-farm locations** and an additional 35% preferred **research farm sites**.
- Results of this program indicate that **a farmer-focused discussion group** is an effective method for improving the understanding of beef production systems and **may enhance on-farm adoption of forage management practices**.
- This program model also effectively uses local Extension and on-farm resources for educational delivery.

Acknowledgments: This work was funded by a USDA Southern SARE Professional Development Grant (ES16-129).

Author Contact Information: Dr. Kim Mullenix, [mullemk@auburn.edu](mailto:mullemk@auburn.edu); 334-844-1546