

OBI celebrates 30 years of excellence

With a 30-year history of performance and quality, Oklahoma Beef Inc. is taking new steps to diversify the program to better accommodate today's needs.

"A bull test has a three-fold mission: to be a demonstration of best practices for performance testing, to evaluate bulls from different herds in a common environment and to serve as a marketing tool for participating breeders," said David Buchanan, animal science professor at Oklahoma State University.

When OBI began in the early '70s, only two breeds were represented—Angus and Hereford. Since then OBI has grown to be the second-largest bull test station in the nation.

"OBI represents a unique aspect where the land is leased from Oklahoma State University and OSU provides the extension service, but the facilities, buildings and other financial aspects are all producer paid," said John Evans, extension specialist at OSU and OBI executive secretary.

Today, eight additional beef breeds have joined membership to the facilities: Beefmaster, Brangus, Charolais, Gelbvich, Limousin, Red Brangus, Polled Hereford and Simmental.

"Other facilities like OBI are usually privately owned or completely university funded," said Evans. "This is what sets OBI aside to be unique."

Oklahoma cattlemen Carlton Cobin of Pittsboro, J.C. Hillier of Stillwater, Burke Healey of Davis, J.O. Pharaoh of Henryetta and Hump Halsey of Mulhall founded OBI. These men had a mission to improve cattle growth and performance, and today, OBI's success continues because of their contributions.

"Ranches are buying bulls from us time and time again. We have some who have bought from OBI for years," said Tim Stidham, OBI station director.

OBI's board of directors holds quarterly meetings to discuss issues concerning the program. Each breed has members to represent it.

Anyone can participate in the bull test program at OBI. Memberships are available to ensure reserved space in the test each year. Members also pay a slightly lower rate than non-members. Sale-fee revenues paid for the sale barn that was built a few years ago. Now, the updated facilities make more room available for buyers.

"OBI provides an avenue for small breeders like me because we are usually limited to selling our livestock to neighbors, but because of OBI, I am able to sell my animals all over the states," said Larry Sebranek, cattleman from Marshall, Okla. "I have regular customers now that follow my bulls at OBI."

OBI works with OSU's veterinary school to monitor and test the bulls while keeping up with technology.

All bulls will have passed a breeding soundness evaluation, which includes examination for physical soundness, scrotal circumference measurement and microscopic evaluation of semen. All bulls will have negative brucellosis test within 30 days unless from a certified brucellosis-free herd.

"OBI enables us to see if our breeding program is comparable with others out there," said Jane Durham, Hereford breeder of Stillwater.

OBI allows producers to evaluate test-growth performance against other producers with an unbiased third party.

"OBI has the cutting edge," said Stidham.

When bulls are tested at OBI, they are delivered and begin a 14-day warm-up period. Then they be-

gin a 112-day test specified by the Beef Improvement Federation. The bulls finish with a seven-day let-down period. The bulls are weighed and height measurements are taken at the beginning and end of the test.

Weights also are taken at 28-day intervals during the test to calculate average daily gain. The bulls are fed a complete ration, which is equivalent to starting feedlot rations. OBI purchases its feed in bulk, making it cheaper for the producer.

Each year, OBI conducts two sales of tested bulls with approximately 350 bulls listed. Sales are held in the fall and spring to meet a range of buyers' needs, and the bulls qualified are those who are in the top 70 percent of the group tested. Evans said only the bulls with soundness and high test numbers will sell.

"OBI can put on a sale and spread costs over multiple producers unlike small producers," said Evans.

In the fall 2003 sale, OBI celebrated 30 years of performance testing. Fifty-one bulls sold at a sale average of \$2,447, and 62 heifers sold at an average of \$929.

In the last 30 years, nearly 18,000 bulls representing 16 breeds have completed the OBI program.

"The way the cattle industry has changed and the way seed-stock producers compete and market cattle made the OBI board of directors decide they needed to do more than just test bulls," said Evans.

The OBI board of directors wanted to provide opportunities for additional services.

One way of providing additional services was implementing a replacement heifer sale. OBI sold 67 heifers in the fall 2002 sale, and it turned out to be a benefit to producers. The heifers sold higher than the market prices for that week. The replacement heifer program is open to any producer just like the bull test program. It allows commercial breeders to get the same genetics and guarantees from the people who are involved with OBI. It also will allow small producers to market their cattle where they have not in the past.

"In time, I would like to get to the point where heifers are out of OBI-tested bulls," said Stidham. "Producers will be able to know what those cattle will do for them because they will have a guarantee to be functional and sound when purchased."

Another attempt to diversify has been providing producers the opportunity to have private treaty sales at the OBI facility. Renting the sale barn and other facilities will enable small producers to compete with larger producers said Stidham.

In 2003, OBI held its first educational field day for the public. This day allowed producers to come and learn the latest information in the beef industry so they can stay progressive. Evans said the first educational field day was a success and people are interested in more to come. For the next field day, OBI will focus on current issues facing the industry, genetic improvement, marketing opportunities and herd health.

Stidham said one of his goals for OBI is to get more breeds involved in the bull test program. He also would like to help producers with customized feeding and heifer development programs.

"At OBI we pride ourselves in serving our customers with individual assistance and providing the performance in our bull sales," said Stidham. "That is what makes us the best!"

◆ *By Jamie Wherley, Broken Arrow, Okla.*

For more information, call Oklahoma Beef Inc. at (405) 744-6060 or at (405) 624-1181 or visit <http://www.ansi.okstate.edu/extend/obi>.

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