

This is an automatically generated transcript, with some minor edits for clarity, to accompany "Buckeye Beef Byte Episode 1: Mike Amstutz".
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Transcript

00:00:00 Clifton Martin

Welcome to the Buckeye Beef Byte. This is Clifton Martin with Ohio State University Extension and the OSU Extension Beef Team. This is episode one of a six part series we're bringing to you here in Winter 2021. To find more look for our episode releases on the OSU Extension Beef Team Newsletter at beef.osu.edu. Check show notes for the links, references and a transcript, or to leave any suggestions or comments and with that will jump right into our program today.

00:00:33 Clifton Martin

I'm here with Garth Ruff, OSU Extension Beef Specialist and my guest today is Mike Amstutz. Hello to both of you.

00:00:40 Mike Amstutz

Hello.

00:00:42 Garth Ruff

Hello Clifton

00:00:43 Clifton Martin

We have several questions for you, Mike, but first we want to set some context. You work at the Agricultural Technical Institute here at OSU, which is up on the Wooster campus. Can you tell us some about what you do and what you?

00:00:57 Mike Amstutz

Yeah hi, good morning and thanks for having me today. I've been a professor at the high state ATI Wooster campus for about 22 years now in my role has been an instructor in the Animal Sciences. I have 100% of teaching appointment, so I primarily teach courses in swine production, Beef production and then I also teach some courses in livestock health. I'm also responsible for teaching what we call farm management courses, food, animal resource management. So these are courses where we actually use the Grace Drake Agricultural Learning Laboratory to teach students the day-to-day management of those types of operations. And then lastly, I oversee the internship program.

00:01:44 Mike Amstutz

So we have an opportunity for students to do internships in various parts of the animal industries. We can talk more about that if you want to later, but they can do internships basically anywhere on any type of operation or any business that's related to animal agriculture. And so that's something that I also oversee.

00:02:08 Garth Ruff

Dr. Amstutz, it sounds like you're pretty busy and pretty involved with teaching students at the ATI campus through your teaching. What are some of the trends as you look at the livestock industry that you think will have significant impact in the next 5 to 10 years?

00:02:25 Mike Amstutz

That's a good question. There's a lot of things that I tried to follow. Some of the bigger trends that I've seen. You know, in recent years. One of the things that happened a few years ago. I'm sure, as you know, are the increase in feed cost. And that led us to trying to identify cattle that are more efficient. And so I think there's been a big push recently to try to measure the differences in growth rates and feed efficiency of cattle. So production, efficiency and, obviously, cost control is always going to be an issue, so those are some things that I watch.

00:03:02 Mike Amstutz

Some of the newer trends are focused around precision, precision, agriculture. Particularly with things like facial recognition. Being able to identify sick animals through some of the increased technology we have. They now make boluses for example, that you can put in the rumen and that will regularly update you on cattle temperatures. There's also some ear tags that do similar types of things to help feed lot producers. Identify cattle that might be running a fever.

00:03:34 Mike Amstutz

So some of this technology that really boils it down to the individual animal in the care of that individual animal is something that I think we need to watch in the future. A couple other things I I keep an eye on because one of the reasons I do is 'cause I teach the animal health class is any advancements in disease, new disease development, new vaccine development, and then any new preventions and treatment. For example, this morning I just saw an article on a new, potential treatment for *Haemonchus contortus* in sheep. So that's something that I will incorporate into my classes for this next semester and then lastly, something I think we always need to be cognizant of is foreign competition what our competitors doing? So those are kind of some of the key areas I watch.

Sure, there are many more. But those are kind of the ones I I kind of focus on.

00:04:33 Garth Ruff

Certainly sounds like, you know with what you highlighted their that record keeping should be a top priority for some of our producers and looking at programs such as beef quality assurance as it relates to animal health and well being of our cattle. Looking more specific to here in Ohio, you know what's unique about the livestock industry or the beef industry here in the state and what resources do we have at the Wooster campus to help support Ohio's beef industry.

00:05:06 Mike Amstutz

Yeah, another good question. The thing about the beef industry here in Ohio is it's quite diverse. I mean, we've got beef producers basically represented by the Amish population all the way up to and we really don't see the the big vertical integration here in Ohio, but there's there's some larger producers in Ohio that have several thousand head of cattle, so there's quite a diversity of what's going on, and types of operations.

Most of the industry in Ohio is obviously the cow calf sector, but there are some some feedlots around, especially some of the people now feeding out some of the Holstein cattle, so that's another little twist that we have to kind of pay attention to. As far as the second part of your question, what resources do we have at OSU to help support the beef industry?

Obviously we have ATI that's near and dear to my heart, because that's where I have my primary role and we attract students from all over the state of Ohio and even some students from out of state.

I know I have some this year from Pennsylvania and Michigan and West Virginia, but you know, we can provide some unique types of training to these students in the in the few years that they're at Ohio State ATI that you just really can't find at too many other campuses. In addition to that right next door neighbors the OARDC, the Ohio Agricultural Research and Development Center.

They're doing world class research there at that facility in beef cattle and other species, but you know, so we have a world class research facility right in our backyard and so being able to pair with them and do some cooperative things is really advantageous to us as a program and one other thing I'll throw in there that that someone that's been a great partner for our program in recent years is a certified Angus beef program. Their headquarters is here in town and we have a great working relationship with them and we do a lot of cooperative things together and then, obviously. Lastly, there's the OSU beef extension team there readily available to provide producers with any any up-to-date information that they might need.

00:07:17 Garth Ruff

So Mike, I understand there's some new beef cattle facilities at the ATI campus. Can you expand on those just a little bit?

00:07:25 Mike Amstutz

Yeah, about six or seven years ago, I think we had constructed a Temple Grandin design handling facility. And to the best of my knowledge, there's only two of these in Ohio. It's a beautiful facility we can handle about 150 cow calf pairs in there at a time, but it's again like I said it was based on a Temple Grandin design and we consulted with her and her team during the construction of that facility.

It works very, very well. Animals flow through there easily. For example, yesterday we bred 91 cows in about 3 hours.

So it's just animals flow through there a lot easier, especially if you know how animal movement works. The other thing that we've just recently constructed this past summer it was completed, is a new mono-slope building to house our feed lot cattle primarily during the winter time. Since we're a fall calving herd.

But we we can house them year round in that facility. So now that the steers are gone, we can put cow calf pairs in there if we need to, to kind of save on some pasture management. So we're really excited about these new facilities. They seem to be working very, very well.

Everyone that sees them thinks they are pretty much state-of-the-art, so that's something that we've needed for a long time.

00:08:50 Garth Ruff

Excellent now you mentioned the Temple Grandin handling facility. You know, being state of the art as far as handling cattle.

What do you think meat producers need to consider to improve animal handling facilities and operations on their own farms?

00:09:07 Mike Amstutz

Yeah, one of the things I think happens is once somebody mentions animal handling, the producers immediately think of facilities and one of the experiences myself and our herdsmen have had and we discussed this. Yesterday is a lot of students come to campus and they really don't understand what animal handling is. They really don't understand.

What a flight zone is or what a point of balance is and how you use those tools to calmly and effectively move cattle. And so one of the first things we do right out of the box in the first laboratory is we actually do an animal handling exercise.

And I group the students in the small groups and I give them a typically a group of four heifers or steers, and I have them move those animals through an obstacle course just to see if they understand that how you position yourself and where you position yourself can dramatically influence how that animal moves and over the course of that laboratory. I think they really come to see that there's a, there's a lot to be said for understanding how a flight zone works and what important balance is. Most of the people that I encounter on day to day basis, you know they come from the club calf industry and that's a great industry, but those cattle are, you know, they're halter broke and so they move in a different manner and they behave in a different manner than animals that are not, and so understanding cattle handling is the first step. And then we can go on and talk about facilities after that.

I personally have my own operation where I raise some cattle, and I've done that for a number of years and I've had nothing more than a head catch so it doesn't have to be fancy. The thing I like to say in class is it needs to be functional.

The facility we have here, I would consider fancy, but you don't really need that. There are some other tools out there. Something as simple as a Bud box for those producers that may not be familiar with that. If you you Google that term, you can find some really great examples of simple Bud boxes you can construct with a series of gate.

So that's something that I think you know as far as a low cost alternative to for an animal handling facility, that's something I would approach and I'm thinking about putting one of those here in in my own facility, even though I do have a a cattle chute now, I think a bud box is a pretty handy tool for working in sorting animals.

00:11:40 Garth Ruff

Yeah, I absolutely agree. You know, as I work with producers in the Eastern and southern part of the state, seems like facilities are often the limiting factor. You know, adding value to our cow calf operations as far as castrations and preconditioning calves and those sorts of things.

So I think there's some certainly some opportunity there, not only from the economic side, but just, you know, low stress handling. The benefit to the animal into the producer himself

During your time at ATI, what changes have you seen in, you know, in the way that we handle cattle in facilities or just over, you know, overarching aspects of the beef industry. From a teaching standpoint?

00:12:24 Mike Amstutz

Well, as you mentioned, you know a lot of the facilities that we see on farms are kind of outdated and antiquated. A lot of them tend to be older facilities that have been constructed from wood, and if they're not maintained properly they tend to deteriorate and fall apart. That's part of the reason, actually, that we ended up with a new facility is that one of our handling facilities was just not functional anymore.

So how is it changed? I'd say we moved a lot towards more metal in the construction of facilities.

There are a lot of advancements actually in animal handling facilities. There's self catching head catches. Now there's turret gates. Again, those are probably some of your larger operations, but you know those kinds of things make it not only safer, but less stressful for animal handling.

Some of these operations that you know we've seen around the country. I take students on field trips during some of our classes, and we go to different places around the country and some of the facilities. The animal handling facilities we've seen are just phenomenal and some of the advancements that they have, so it really helps. Like I said, not only in low stress animal handling but also making it safer for the operator as you actually don't have to be in the alleyway with the cattle, you can kind of be separated from them.

00:13:53 Clifton Martin

Mike, I'm going to jump in here and go back to talking about students and just some of the things that you focus on in teaching. You mentioned internships at the top of the interview and I thought we could go back and revisit that for a moment.

You know what are some of these opportunities that exist at your program at ATI? And then what do these internships look like?

00:14:17 Mike Amstutz

OK, that's a great question. A lot of different opportunities here, and so when students come to me and they ask about internships, the first question I asked them to turn it around on them as I asked them, well, what kind of career do you think you want to have once you leave here?

Because an internship is a great way to get your foot in the door for those types of careers.

00:14:38 Mike Amstutz

And so I traditionally ask them a couple of questions you know, do you want to be in the cow calf sector or do you want to be in the Stocker backgrounder sector? Or would you prefer to be in feed lot? Are you interested in nutrition reproduction, genetics? You know what field are they particularly interested in? And then I can kinda help guide them as to where they might look for internships.

I do like to see students try to find internships on their own, but if they need help, I'm more than willing to do that and students, depending on which of those career paths they select, you know we've had students go all over the United States, particularly if they want to get that large ranch experience or the feed lot experience. Those students traditionally look more towards some of the western states and so these internships can be done anywhere in the world. But the thing that that happens is they they get a lot of experience there.

00:15:33 Mike Amstutz

They make great Contacts in the industry. They get paid and they get college credit all at the same time. So an internship to me is is the first stepping stone in your career and a lot of times what happens is if students go out on their internship and they do a good job, they will actually get a job offer from that employer.

So that's a great way to get yourself started in the industry.

00:15:57 Clifton Martin

Do you find, again just as you're working with students you know are there particular key themes, I think you mentioned a few here as we've talked, but just a few key themes that you focus on. You know, as you work with students, making sure specific things that they know and understand about raising livestock?

00:16:16 Mike Amstutz

Yeah, in addition to the animal handling, which I think is one of the first things they need to learn, there are some other things I really try to focus on. I try to, I mentioned a lot of our students come from that club calf background. I really tried to give them an appreciation for what the commercial beef industry is.

00:16:35 Mike Amstutz

I mentioned I take students on those those field trips. We usually take, we can go out West and we've covered almost every western state except for some of the northern ones simply because of when we take the trip. The weather is somewhat inclement, but we take him out there and show him some of these things to show him how the commercial industry on a larger scale is much different than what most of them have experienced.

00:17:01 Mike Amstutz

In Ohio, most beef producers, it's not their primary occupation. In other words, it's an avocation. It's something they do for a hobby. I mentioned, I raised livestock. I do it as a hobby. My primary, you know career track is as a professor, but I love cattle and I love other livestock. And that's why I raise 'em.

But to do that for a living you really understand, you need to understand how to operate it as a business, a true business.

Some other things I try to emphasize during some of the courses is that open or nonproductive animals are just money pits and you need to get rid of 'em.

They will drain your profit faster than about anything else so you know narrow breeding windows. Keeping those cows calving all in a narrow window is something that we really strive for. You know, I mentioned we bred the entire herd yesterday, so we'll give them one, possibly two more chances. But we really try to keep that into a 60 day calving window. The other thing I see a lot of a lot of producers across the United States, not necessarily in Ohio, Don't preg check cows as much as they should and those open cows are just real money pits like I mentioned.

00:18:21 Mike Amstutz

Third thing I like to give students an appreciation for all the different careers that that are out there in the livestock industry. And I mentioned some of those during the internship section that we just talked about. So I won't go back into those. But there are just tremendous numbers of opportunities. You know, most people think that you know, production is the only opportunity and that's just not true. There's so many other things, there's reproduction, genetics, nutrition, sales. There's just so many different things I'll just give you a brief example here. One of my former students actually went on to be an auctioneer and he is extremely successful.

So that's something you wouldn't normally think of as an agriculture career, but that's something that's obviously very available.

00:19:09 Mike Amstutz

And then Lastly the thing I tried to impart to students is that, you know, learning is a life long process and agriculture is constantly changing. The field of beef production is constantly changing and you have to stay up to date with what these trends are and not every trend and tool is going to be useful on your operation, but some of them will be.

And it's your job to figure out which ones are going to work for you and which ones aren't.

00:19:37 Garth Ruff

Yeah Mike, I think you hit on a lot of key themes there that are important not only for students, but it really should be taking messages for hopefully a lot of the producers that listen to this recording today.

You know, we talked about profitability, talked about the different sectors I'm including handling facilities.

Yeah, very good overview of you know, some things we need to look at. Take a deeper look at as producers here going forward, so I certainly appreciate your time talking with us here today and I'll turn it back over to Clifton.

00:20:18 Clifton Martin

All right, thank you. Thank you, Mike. Thank you Garth. Appreciate you both taking the time to do this and we're going to sign off here and I appreciate your time, thanks.

00:20:28 Mike Amstutz

Thank you for having me today.

00:20:31 Clifton Martin

Thanks.

00:20:32 Garth Ruff

Thank you.

00:20:34 Clifton Martin

This is Clifton back, again with a few closing notes. As a reminder, we have more episodes in this series which we are releasing through the OSU Extension Beef Team newsletter and that can be found at beef.osu.edu. If you have suggestions or comments or anything you would like to share with us, use the comments and suggestions link in our show notes to let us know how we are doing.

These comments help us out and help us make sure we're finding resources that are useful for you, the listener. This is episode number one of the Buckeye Beef Byte. Thanks for listening.