Chianina and Chiangus Cattle hold a Vital Place in Cattle Market

By Taylor Greenstreet

Louisville, KY – November 13, 2012 - Dr. Robin Sheets, President of the National Chianina Board, is enthusiastic about Chianina cattle. He and his wife, Rebecca Sheets, own Sheets Chiangus in West Lafayette, IN. Dr. Sheets started showing by growing up on the farm. In fact, his family had the first Chi cattle in Indiana in 1973. His children showed cattle through 4-H and it was a “good family thing” to do.

Chianina cattle originated in the Tuscany Valley in Italy. A fun fact that the Sheets family shared is that Roman sculptures of bulls are actually Chi bulls. They were brought to Canada, and the first calf born in North America was in 1971.

Chi cattle are used actively in the show ring and in the feed lot. Dr. Sheets said the cattle are unique in that they have so much potential for rate of gain and carcass qualities. He said the breed is using DNA markers and are combining this with visual evaluation to select high quality animals. Chianina cattle excel in low cholesterol and high tenderness genes. Bulls have high calving ease scores, and their progeny are quickly market ready. On the maternal side the cows have tight udders and are known for their longevity. Both are important qualities for a successful production operation.

Dennis Clarahan feeds about 1,000 head of Chi/Chiangus cattle in Harper, IA. He has been improving the breed since the late 1970’s and he has never strayed from the breed. He is also a retired president of the National Chianina Board. Dennis said that Chi cattle offer great longevity and carcass qualities. There is a high percentage of yield grade 1 and 2’s and a good percentage of Chi carcasses high in tenderness.

In his own herd, Dennis is tracking identity profiles, more specifically to track the tenderness gene. He has five bulls with a 9 for the tenderness gene. His goal is to see how the final product of these bulls’ progeny really turn out. He is hoping for a high percentage with a tenderness gene of 9.
Dr. Sheets’ favorite aspect of Chianina cattle are their looks and longevity. He said they can be easily crossbred with other breeds, and that the breed has been the leader in composite breeding for many years now. “We were composite breeding before it was popular, and now many breeds are doing the same thing,” said Dr. Sheets.

Because of composite breeding, Chi cattle have been dominant in the club calf industry, especially in the steer ring. According to Dr. Sheets, this goes back to female matings that combine performance and look. Dennis said, “about every (steer) champ has a little Chi blood, for that style and look.”

Both gentlemen are very enthusiastic about their breed, and they have high hopes for the future of Chi and Chiangus cattle. The National Chianina/Chiangus show will be held tomorrow at 8 a.m. in Freedom Hall at the NAILE.