

Adding Value to Virginia's agricultural products

March 25, 2013 – The Virginia-Maryland Regional College of Veterinary Medicine contributes to the success of Virginia's beef and dairy producers through programs that add value to the state's livestock while safeguarding its food supply.

Veterinarians Dee Whittier and John Currin - Virginia Cooperative Extension faculty members in the Department of Large Animal Clinical Sciences - are training Extension agents and livestock producers across the commonwealth through the Virginia Beef Quality Assurance Program. The program adds \$1.5 million to \$2 million to the value of cattle on Virginia's certified farms, according to data compiled annually by Extension specialists and agents.



Veterinarian Dee Whittier (second from right) provides information about beef cattle health management to Virginia Cooperative Extension agriculture and natural resources agents.

"Through the certification program, producers learn about best management practices that improve the safety and quality of their beef," Whittier said. "We provide training and education on a variety of veterinary topics, such as herd health and the proper administration of vaccines."

Under the umbrella of the national Beef Quality Assurance Program that is administered by the National Cattlemen's Beef Association, the Virginia program has certified about 4,500 producers, accounting for half of the commonwealth's cattle. With such a large number of participants, Virginia is one of the leaders in beef quality assurance. Program leaders prepare materials and organize training in cooperation with other Mid-Atlantic states.

Extension veterinarians also collaborate with faculty members on campus, agents in the field, the Virginia Cattlemen's Association, the Virginia Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services, and

local cattlemen organizations to help producers market the health and genetic management used to produce feeder calves. The Virginia Quality Assured Feeder Cattle Program encourages the use of scientifically based cattle health and management procedures for feeder cattle. It adds about \$30 in value per head of cattle to the 17,000 calves marketed through the program in a typical 12-month period. The program has returned an estimated \$3.3 million premium to producers over the past 12 years.

Veterinarians assist in Extension's efforts to control and prevent Johne's disease, a chronic gastrointestinal disease in ruminants that has a significant economic impact on dairy and beef cattle operations in Virginia. They also work to safeguard animal health through disease traceability, teach skills to beginning to midlevel beef producers through a cow-calf management course, and train Virginia's food animal veterinarians and producers to utilize the Society for Theriogenology's bull breeding soundness evaluation.
