FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

10 Years of Beef Cattle Short Course Connects Pennsylvania Producers with Hands-On Learning

Pennsylvania Beef Producers Working Group-supported program pairs live cattle evaluation with carcass assessment to strengthen producer decision-making

STATE COLLEGE, Pa. — October 29, 2026 — For 10 years, Pennsylvania beef producers have had a rare opportunity to follow cattle from live evaluation to carcass assessment through Penn State Extension's Beef Cattle Short Course, an educational program developed with support from the Pennsylvania Beef Producers Working Group.

The two-day course was created specifically for beef cattle producers and combines practical, hands-on learning with educational content shaped by producer questions and needs from across the Commonwealth.

Each year, participants begin by evaluating live cattle and considering the physical attributes associated with desirable beef outcomes. The following day, they evaluate those same cattle as carcasses, giving producers an opportunity to see firsthand how live-animal characteristics translate to yield and quality.

Because the course is held at Penn State and utilizes the university's meat laboratory, participants can go beyond observing carcasses and also take part in the evaluation process, including measuring ribeye area, estimating marbling scores, and assessing other carcass characteristics.

"The hands-on component is really what makes this program unique," said Tara Felix, Associate Professor and Extension Beef Cattle Specialist for Penn State University. "Producers aren't just being shown what a carcass looks like; they have the opportunity to evaluate it themselves and connect what they saw in the live animal to what they see on the rail."

Felix developed the Beef Cattle Short Course through conversations with the Pennsylvania Beef Producers Working Group to address educational needs that can be difficult to meet in other settings.

While the live-cattle and carcass evaluation remains a cornerstone of the program each year, additional educational content is updated based on producer feedback and emerging needs.

For 2026, the course included instruction on bovine respiratory disease, ration formulation, herd health tools and technology used in beef production systems. The program aimed to provide valuable hands-on education to beef cattle producers, beef cattle nutritionists, and small meat packers.

This responsiveness to producer needs reflects the Pennsylvania Beef Producers Working Group's broader role: bringing producers and industry organizations together to identify shared challenges and connect producers with education, expertise, and resources that strengthen their operations.

Over the program's 10-year history, the course repeatedly fills to capacity. Participants—many of whom are starting their beef business—regularly cite the course as a source of both high-value information and confidence. Those outcomes help illustrate the value of investing in education that gives producers both technical information and opportunities to apply it directly.

"The Beef Cattle Short Course is a great example of what the Working Group is designed to do. It brings people and resources together around the needs of Pennsylvania beef producers," said Nichole Hockenberry, Executive Director of the Pennsylvania Beef Council and a member of the Pennsylvania Beef Producers Working Group. "For 10 years, this program has given producers access to hands-on education that is difficult to replicate elsewhere, while continuing to evolve around the questions and challenges producers are facing. Support through the Pennsylvania Department of Agriculture's Ag Excellence line item helps make opportunities like this possible and extends their value across Pennsylvania's beef industry."

For more information about the Beef Cattle Short Course, visit:
Penn State Extension Beef Cattle Short Course

Suggested photos attached.

About the Pennsylvania Beef Producers Working Group

The Pennsylvania Beef Working Group brings together regional beef producers and stakeholders from Pennsylvania's beef-focused agricultural organizations to support producers and strengthen the Commonwealth's beef industry. Through education, industry resources, research, collaborative initiatives, and more, the Working Group serves as a unified network that connects producers with the tools, expertise, and opportunities to enhance productivity, sustainability, and long-term success.

Together, these efforts foster collaboration, address evolving industry needs, and position Pennsylvania's beef industry for continued growth and prosperity. Funding support from the Pennsylvania Department of Agriculture's Ag Excellence line item helps make these producer-focused educational programs, resources, and industry initiatives possible.