Cattle ranchers are a diverse lot with a common interest: producing and selling beef.

And that is the common theme of the presentations by more than two dozen speakers during the Range Beef Cow Symposium, Nov. 29 through Dec. 1 at Mitchell.

But the individual topics are as diverse as the industry. They range from protecting the raw resources to selling the finished product, and include protecting pastures from drought; improving herd genetics; feeding and caring for animals; marketing and branding beef; passing the land on to the next generation; and all the art, science, politics and guessing involved in each of these.

The Range Beef Cow Symposium XXII is scheduled for Nov. 29 and 30 and Dec. 1 at the Mitchell Events Center at the Scotts Bluff County Fairgrounds. Evening “Bullpen” sessions will take place Tuesday and Wednesday at the Gering Civic Center.

In addition to the speakers, vendors from various segments of the livestock industry will have displays at the symposium: breed associations, feed companies, pharmaceutical providers, and equipment manufacturers.

Registration can be completed online at www.rangebeefcow.com. Brochures and registration forms also are available at Scotts Bluff County Extension, 308-632-1480. More information is available from Karla Jenkins at 308-632-1245.

A sampling of the topics to be covered:

Lucy C. Meyring of Walden, CO, will be part of an owner panel discussing the transfer of ownership of land and ranch enterprises. She will share both dos and don’ts of land transfer. For example, Meyring has a list titled “Top Ten Things Families Do to Break up their Ranching Operations,” in the manner of late-night TV talk show host David Letterman. Among the top ten: presuming a conversation is a contract; believing mind reading is an acceptable form of

communication; and failing to build communication skills and business/family meeting tools when the times are good so they'll be in place to use when the times get tough.

Consumers' desire to know where their food comes from—and their willingness to pay more for it—will be addressed by Chris Calkins of the UNL Department of Animal Science, who will talk about the importance of steak origin to restaurant customers. Calkins conducted an online survey of customers at several high-end restaurants that showed more than 60 percent of people surveyed would be willing to pay a premium for a steak that was locally raised or Nebraska source-verified.

Travis Choat of Elanco Animal Health will talk about the role of highly efficient food production in ending world hunger, lowering food costs, protecting consumer rights and safeguarding natural resources. Higher efficiency requires protecting rights of the entire food production chain to use new and existing technologies while sustaining consumer choice, according to Choat.

He will cite Elanco research that citizens of the poorest countries can spend from 50 percent to 80 percent of their income on food, and maintains that "food producers worldwide must be free to choose from a variety of safe and proven tools and methods for growing an abundance of food with maximum efficiency."

For ranchers in Nebraska and surrounding regions, surviving and recovering from the severe and lengthy drought that began in 2002 was a major challenge. UNL's Jerry Volesky of the West Central Research and Extension Center will stress the benefits of planning ahead to offset the drought's reduction of the forage supply.

At UNL's Gudmundsen Sandhills Laboratory, researchers identified about nine separate herd management decisions made in 2002 that, together, saved 1,197 AUMs (animal unit months). The decisions involved timely culling of the herd, weaning calves a month early, shipping steer calves and selling surplus heifer calves soon after weaning, selling open cows early, wintering cows on corn stalks and other steps.

The end result was 76 cow days of feed saved for the 520-cow herd. Monitoring conditions and making decisions such as these could help producers minimize the long-term effects of drought, such as serious pasture damage and herd reductions, the research shows.

The first speaker Tuesday morning will be former ag secretary and U.S. Sen. Mike Johanns (R-Neb.), who will provide an update about policy affecting the U.S. cattle industry. Johanns is scheduled to speak via distance technology from his office at Washington.

Another big issue is ethanol production, which competes with the cattle industry for corn but also supplies it with feedstuffs from ethanol production byproducts. Andy Gottschalk of HedgersEdge.Com LLC will speak on the topic Tuesday morning as well.

Other topics and presenters include:

Public Issues—Trent Loos, LoosTales

Current Inventory—Causes and Effects, Where Are We Headed? Jim Robb, Livestock Marketing Information Center

Cost of Production—Calculating your Unit Cost of Production—Aaron Berger, UNL Extension Educator

The Future Structure of Beef Production: Calf-Feds, Yearlings, Stockers—Tom Brink, JBS Five Rivers Cattle Feeding

What Are Sub-Therapeutic Antibiotics and Can We Do Without Them? Mike Apley, Production medicine, Clinical Pharmacology, KSU

Weaned Calf/Growing Options: How Do We Economically Produce a 1,000-Pound Steer for Feedlot Entry? Terry Klopfenstein, Ruminent Nutrition, UNL

Cow Side of Producing a 1,000 Pound Feeder, Cow Size and Expenses—Ken Olson, Justin Waggoner, John Jaeger, Beef Specialists, SDSU and KSU

Determining Who Makes Land Use Decisions, Land Ownership or Land Control and What Decision Options Exist—Dave Goeller, North Central Risk Management Education Center

Genomics for the Rancher: How Does It Work and What Does It Mean? Jack Whittier, Beef Specialist, CSU

Implementation of Marker Assisted EPDs—Matt Spangler, Beef Genetics, UNL

Feed Efficiency—How Should It Be Used for the Cow Herd? Andy Roberts, Research Scientist, USDA Agricultural Research Service

How to Capture Added Value for the Calves—Troy Marshall, Marshall Cattle Company, Colorado

Adding Value to Calves—How to Get Age and Source Verified and How to Capitalize on It—Todd Thrift, Beef Cattle Management, University of Florida

Activities and Benefits from Exporting Beef—Paul Clayton and Phil Seng, US Meat Export Federation

50 Years of Beef Reproduction through My Eyes: Past, Present and Future—George Seidel, Distinguished Professor, Biomedical Sciences, CSU

How Do We Achieve Proper Vaccination Immunity? Jerry Stokka, Pfizer Animal Health

Labor Solutions for Ranch Operations: How to Find and Regain Quality Employees—Harry Knobbe, Knobbe Cattle Company, Nebraska

Economic Model for Multiple Land Use—John Ritten, Agricultural and Applied Economics, University of Wyoming

Optimizing Range management for Game Bird Habitat—Ben Geaumont, wildlife biologist, NDSU Market Outlook, CattleFAX