CARCASS EVALUATION OPPORTUNITIES
Most cattlemen have ideas about production practices for raising a calf from birth to weaning. Some of you put those calves through a backgrounding phase and then sell those calves as 700 to 850 pound cattle ready to go to the finishing or feedlot. Unfortunately, that’s where your close association with the beef production enterprise ends.

In many ways you’re missing out on perhaps the most critical parts of the beef chain which goes from conception to consumer. Coming up in a week or two there are two events that I think you’ll find worthwhile to attend.

On June 25, 7 pm in the University of Missouri Extension Center in the courthouse at Mt. Vernon will have the Steer Feedout Finale. This event will reveal how the 158 steers we sent to southwest Iowa last November actually performed in the feedlot and on the road. Those steers came from herds in southwest, central, northeast and northwest Missouri and we fed out at Gregory Feedlot near Tabor, Iowa. When finished they were marketed through Tyson’s new grid system. This system rewards highly desirable carcasses while severely discounting those “outs” or less desirable steers.

A number of you attended the beginning of the Steer Feedout last November at Joplin Regional Stockyards. At the Southwest Missouri Cattlemen’s Association meeting that evening each participant’s steers were brought into the ring and evaluated by order buyers, cattle graders and marketers for important characteristics such as fleshiness, muscle thickness, frame size, fill, condition, color and how they felt they would perform on down the road. Each person attending was given a question/answer sheet on which they could record their ideas about each group.

On the 25th we’ll reveal how everyone did on estimating the different group’s performance. The finale will have the individual steer’s picture along with their rate of gain, sickness record, cost of gain, carcass quality, yield grade, profitability and rank from best to worst on overall retail value from birth to slaughter. As usually is the case, there will be surprises.

Everyone is welcome to attend as I feel even if you didn’t have steers in the program you’ll be able to relate to how some cattle did and compare to yours.

To help plan for handouts and room space please notify us at 417-466-3102 by June 24 if you plan to attend. There is no cost for this educational evening.

On July 2, at Cloud’s Meats, Carthage we’ll give you another shot at learning some details on what cattle look like after you remove the hide. We will have 8 carcasses on display that have been the 4-H steer project for boys and girls in Lawrence county since early February.

Ty Peckman, grad student, University of Missouri will be there to explain the process of grading and evaluating a beef carcass. After listening to him you’ll feel like you could go into the cooler and be a competent beef grader. Andy Cloud and the crew are always great hosts for this event which begins at 6 pm. Cloud’s location is on West Fairview Road, west of I-49.

HILLS OR HOLLOW CATTLE
I was fascinated recently by an article from the Progressive Cattleman magazine. The article revealed research conducted at research stations and on several ranches in the west about grazing preferences. They tracked cows with GPS collars for up to 3 ½ months to see what type of terrain they grazed on. They did DNA testing to see how the hill vs. low land cows compared genetically and there was a difference found on chromosome 29.

The author, Derek W. Bailey, New Mexico State University drew these conclusions:

- Heifers raised on your ranch are adapted to the local environment and have learned what plants to eat and where to forage.
• Purchased heifers should be from environments similar to your ranch.
• During a drought, adjust your stocking rate so you have a core group of cows with the genetics and experience to thrive in your conditions.

It’s pretty amazing what all we’re learning from DNA tests.

**UNANSWERED QUESTION**
A reader recently asked if I could tell him why his cows didn’t like the lush pasture growth under black walnut trees. This is not the first time I’ve heard that question. I’m sorry I don’t have a research-based, unbiased, replicated study to draw on from a referred journal that addresses that question.

In talking to cattle producers, there’s almost an even split with some agreeing that they too have seen that on their farm while the others say the cattle graze under their walnut trees just fine. University researchers say they’ve not observed any problems.

Walnuts are known to actually retard some plant growth under and near them due to a compound they produce called juglone. There is no mention made of it being transferred into the forage and causing animal refusal.

**GRAZING SCHOOL WISDOM**
Without a doubt the Grazing Schools held around the state since about 1990 rank as one of the best teaching tools that Extension and the NRCS folks have provided our state’s farmers. We held our annual school in late April at the University’s Southwest Center, Mt. Vernon with 39 persons attending.

I always keep my eyes and ears open for little bits of wisdom and knowledge to pass along, so here’s a few tidbits from the recent school.

• Tim Schnakenberg, extension agronomist - Bluegrass can almost become a weed in a stand of fescue because it matures early and gives a low level of production per acre. Bluegrass tends to thrive due to overgrazing or maybe the use of harvesting equipment that cuts the grass too short.
• Wesley Tucker, extension ag business specialist – Cows are a status symbol and cattlemen have an evil desire to own more cows than their neighbor. If you have 80 cows you want 100, if you have 600 you want 1000.
• Wesley (again) - Why do you focus on growing more pasture/hay when you’re only utilizing 30 to 35% of what you’re producing.
• Darrel Franson, cattle producer whose grazing system we visited during the school – If you do it, record it! I spend about one hour per week entering cow, pasture, weather data in the computer and 4 hours per week studying it.

**JUSTIN’S LEAVING**
Justin Sexten, University of Missouri Extension beef nutrition specialist will be leaving us in the next few weeks to work for Certified Angus Beef. He’ll be based in Ohio.

Justin has been a great state specialist and will be missed. He was an extremely popular speaker at meetings, tours, conferences, etc. His humor, research-backed knowledge and common-sense approach was appreciated by all. Well, maybe not by some feed companies.

Thanks Justin, for your time spent educating Missourians on beef/forage nutrition, utilization, etc.

**MORE GRAZING SCHOOL LESSONS**
One of the exercises we do at the SW Center school is called pasture allocation. We have a pasture and divide the students into groups to decide how much space they need to provide 24 hours of grazing for 5 or 6 yearling heifers weighing 500 to 600 lbs. The different teams then determine where in the big pasture they want to layout their 24 hour allotment. They can even decide if they want a round, square, triangle or rectangular area.

After 24 hours we go back to “grade” each group’s setup. Normally, groups way over estimate the area the heifers need. After 24 hours you can barely tell they ate anything. Well, this year’s experience was a perfect result demonstration. One group gave their heifers way too much space, one was just about right with 3 or 4 inches of fescue growth remaining from the 7 or 8 inches they started with. Then one group’s pasture was completely grubbed into the ground.

The allotment exercise is done early in the school before they are armed with the tools that could help them hit the target. As we critique each group’s effort we determined the short pasture only provided the heifers with about 11 pounds of dry matter for the 24 hours. The 550 pound heifers probably need 14 pounds. Plus the fescue variety was a novel one that the heifers found very palatable thus they ate it so short it will take it several more weeks to regain proper grazing height. If you have a chance try to attend a grazing school.