STEER FEEDOUT REVIEW

Enclosed is a thumbnail sketch of the results of the 2012-13 Missouri Steer Feedout. As you can quickly see by looking at the numbers, all steers are not created equally! The 147 steers that were slaughtered had vastly different numbers. Only one steer actually showed a profit. That steer was entered by Bart Renkoski, Purdy and he made a whopping $8.42 profit during the feeding/packing phase.

In contrast, the largest loss per head was $618.32. Many factors contribute to the profit and loss differences of these two steers. Contrasting these two extremes the return difference is largely due to the initial value of the two steers and the difference in average daily gains in the feedlot which showed up in carcass weights.

As you can see, there are groups of steers that are close to the 70-70-0 carcass target. Our Missouri steers seem to have a hard time making 70% low Choice or better. I suspect some of the sires of our cattle may not have really good marbling EPDs. Certainly, if we go back a generation on the dam’s side, low marbling is probably a concern.

Another factor the last couple of years could be the stress of dry, hot weather both as nursing calves and as developing fetuses. This latter situation is called fetal programming and is being researched extensively as we look for answers to many questions revolving around animal performance.

BUSBY’S COMMENTS

Darrell Busby, manager of the Tri-County Steer Carcass Futurity in southwest Iowa where we send our feedout steers, was down for our feedout program last month. Here are some of his comments.

- The heavy financial losses seen in the past year are the worst since the TCSCF was started in the early 80s.
- He said if this past winter’s futurity was the first one, there would never be a second one due to the losses.
- About 32% of the cattle in the program were covered through risk management which still resulted in significant losses, but they did not lose as much as those with no risk management.
- When asked why more did not utilize risk management, he said because everyone believed the forecast of $141 fat cattle prices in the spring. Also, they thought corn prices would drop.
- In spite of the loss of money the past year, TCSCF has more cattle coming to their lots this summer than in any previous summer. There is still optimism about feeding cattle.
- Weight change is the best indicator of a calf’s recovery from sickness as compared to body temperature.
- The TCSCF lots treat 75% of the unweaned calves they receive. Treatment costs average in the $24 to $30 range each time medication is given individually.

Darrell was asked how long it would be before profits returned to the cattle feeding business. He didn’t hesitate to say, “next year.” He added that cattle feeders would squeeze the profit out of the cow-calf producer by paying less for calves. This fall might be a good time to put some steers in the feedout if the calf market is weak.

I understand why many cow-calf raisers do not want to enter the feedout since there is a risk of not making any money or even losing money, compared to the value of the feeder calf at weaning. However, if you’re in the cow business for the long haul, I encourage you to do some sampling of your herd’s genetics through feedout participation.

SOUTHERN CARCASS IMPROVEMENT PROJECT

Back in April, 2012 I was on a tour to western Kansas and visited Gardiner Angus Ranch. Mark Gardiner mentioned their cooperation on a project to compare the difference in carcass quality and value when a set of southern cows were bred to either high carcass value Angus bulls or to a selection of southern-type bulls which carried Brahman and Senepol influence.

I recently ran across a report on this trial, thanks to Tom Troxel, University of Arkansas Extension beef specialist. He summarized the results in the Beef Cattle Research Update.

There were 12 dams with ¼ to ½, visual Bos indicus influence and they were the embryo-producing cows. Those cows produced 112 progeny. Of those, 59 were Angus-sired and 53 were by the southern sires. The recipient dams were of common genetics. The resulting
The one cross made quite an impact because the Angus bulls were selected for carcass merit and high accuracy. Perhaps they even viewed the $B of index when selecting those bulls. Whereas, the southern bulls were randomly selected on available semen from AI companies. They might not have had EPDs. To some this was stacking the deck, but it shows what can be done to enhance progeny performance with EPDs and artificial insemination.

**STATE BEEF TOUR**

Last year we hosted the University of Missouri’s State Extension Beef Tour. This year the tour will be in northeast Missouri on August 24 in Marion and Lewis counties. The northeast part of the state is a really good, diversified cow-calf, seedstock, cattle feeding area. The four hosts this year will provide an excellent tour. Watch the papers and magazines for details. I know it’s clear across the state, but should be worth the time. As I’ve often said, “you don’t’ learn much by staying home all the time.”

**K.C. FARMER’S MARKET**

A few weekends ago while visiting my son in Kansas City we went to a couple of big farmer’s markets. I’m always interested in vendors with beef for sale and their pitch.

The vendors I talked to came from Moberly, King City, Leeton, Lee’s Summit and Welch, OK. All had a pretty long trip. The man from Welch said he’d driven the 181 mile trip for 5 years. He felt it was worth his time.

The breed makeup for the different vendors was quite a mix. Included were: Scotch Highland, Charolais x Longhorn, straight Longhorn, Angus x Devon and Angus.

All were promoting their beef as natural with one, claiming their beef was organic certified. Some were grass fed. I asked what their customers were looking for and they said lean beef that was safe for their families. They do not worry or ask about the grade of beef. They want it to be free of antibiotics and hormones and if they wanted to take their family to the farm and see the cattle, they could. The latter indicated their interest in it being locally produced.

One seller said he felt anyone with 30 cows, who is willing to work can make a decent living producing all-natural beef. He is a strong advocate of using a management intensive grazing systems. He didn’t describe, “a decent living.” I did notice all their beef was priced fairly high, as you might expect. However, there were lots of shoppers and they appeared to have the finances to pay extra for the beef.

**WHAT’S A FREEMARTIN?**

Most folks know that a freemartin is a heifer, born twin to a bull and as a result of the two fetuses sharing a common blood supply, the heifer is abnormally developed sexually. We generally find about 90% of those heifers to be sterile.

When a veterinarian examines the Show-Me-Select candidates, it’s not uncommon to find a heifer that’s a free martin. The owners sometimes will check his records and say, “yes, there was a twin bull with her.” Sometimes they’ll say “no she was a single.” Well apparently the single heifer calf did have a brother early in gestation that affected her sexual development.

The next question usually is “why do they call them freemartins?” I’d never heard an explanation until I read one in a magazine recently. The story is that in the mid-1600s, European farmers would donate the sterile heifers to the annual Saint Martin celebration. Since the heifers’ value was minimal, the free heifers became known as freemartins. I guess that makes sense, at least it’s the only explanation I’ve heard.

**RFI & HEIFER DEVELOPMENT**

Feed conversion is a trait of great concern as feed costs escalate. We’ve always known that feed measurement/efficiency/conversion was important but it wasn’t practical to measure in most situations. Then along came the GrowSafe Feeding System which allows for more accurate data gathering on individual cattle intake of feed. From this data a term evolved known as residual feed intake (RFI). From the feed intake data, two animals might make the same average daily gain but one eats more than the other. If their gain is the same, the one with less feed intake is more efficient.

When you select for a trait among animals there are other traits that may be affected either positively or negatively. As we select for RFI, researchers are discovering some interesting things. I saw a review in a recent Journal of Animal Science from Texas Agri Life Research, Randel and Welsh that implied selection for low RFI results in selection for leaner heifers that reach puberty at an older age. Those heifers calve later in their first and future calving seasons. In their summary statement they state there may not be an acceptable method to improve feed efficiency without negatively affecting reproductive efficiency.