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Good Bull Buying Rests on Knowing Your Cattle

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Management decisions based on data is the mantra for good beef production. One large challenge that exists is that data collection and reporting doesn't coincide with the time the data needs to be reviewed and utilized.

Feedlot data is a good example. Data gradually is generated over months and often set aside when it is needed the most - when producers are shopping for new herd bulls.

While the data was collected 10 to 12 months ago, it is important to access the reports because the data sheets are the most current available. The Dickinson Research Extension Center finishes calves produced at the center.

We pull the feedlot sheets to evaluate steer performance. In 2005 (most recent data available), the steer calves were fed in five separate lots, each in its own environment.

For the purpose of discussion, one sample lot of calves will be reviewed. The lot, reflective of the calves the center produced, arrived at the feedlot on Nov. 14, 2005.

Seventy-four head had an average off-truck weight of 640 pounds. These calves, typical Midwestern medium-framed calves with average flesh, had an average pay weight of 667 pounds and were valued at $118.50 per hundredweight.

As the calves were processed into the lot, they averaged 642 pounds and 0.18 inch of backfat and stood, on average, 45.7 inches at the hip. The calves started to be harvested on April 12, 2006, with an average sale date of April 30 after 167 days on feed.

Two calves from the lot died and one had been sold as a railer. In this illustration, because we are evaluating performance, lot data is presented without the dead calves and railer. If the lot was to be evaluated on dollar performance, the dead calves and railer probably should remain in the averages.

The lot had a dry matter feed efficiency of 4.9 pounds of feed per pound of gain and an average daily gain of 3.57 pounds. The calves averaged 1,261 pounds as they left the lot based on a calculated live shrink at the time of sale. The hot carcass weight averaged 797 pounds on the rail.

In terms of quality on the rail, the calves were 14.1 percent upper choice, 29.6 percent choice and 56.3 percent select. The yield grade (YG) distribution was 2.8 percent YG1, 28.2 percent YG2, 56.3 percent YG3 and 12.7 percent YG4. The rib eye area averaged 12.9 square inches.

Reflecting on the data, the actual frame of 4.8 was smaller than your typical Midwestern calves. However, the calves' gain and feed performance certainly was in the ballpark. As they were sold on the rail, more choice calves would have been beneficial.

In terms of muscle and fat, the calves were short on muscle and a little strong on fat. For example, on April 27, a choice quality yield grade 3 carcass brought $138.55, an upper choice yield grade 3 carcass brought $142.05 and a choice yield grade 2 carcass brought $142.55. One certainly would smile if all the carcasses had been choice or higher with at least a yield grade of 2 or lower.

All good things can be carried too far, since a choice yield grade 4 carcass brought $128.55. In terms of the select quality grade, a select yield grade 1 carcass brought $128.44, a select yield grade 2 carcass brought $128.44 and a select yield grade 3 carcass brought $124.44.

In the end, finding bulls that maintain or enhance growth is important. For the cows these calves are out of, significant bull pressure needs to be applied to the ability to improve quality grade and add rib eye.

May you find all your ear tags.

Your comments are always welcome at *www.BeefTalk.com*. For more information, contact the NDBCIA Office, 1041 State Ave., Dickinson, ND 58601 or go to *www.CHAPS2000.com* on the Internet.

Bottom Line – Quality Does Pay

Carcass Values on April 27, 2006

Upper choice, yield grade 3	$142.05
Choice, yield grade 2	$142.55
Choice, yield grade 3	$138.55
Choice, yield grade 4	$128.55
Select, yield grade 1	$128.44
Select, yield grade 2	$128.44
Select, yield grade 3	$124.44