



BeefTalk 678: Making a “Premium” Calf

SUPPORTING MATERIALS

Calves That Excel

Superior Genetics

Sound Management

Preconditioning

Tag Identification

Certification

Marketing Strategy

There are six steps to placing premium calves on the market.

What makes a premium calf? There are six steps to placing premium calves that excel on the market: superior genetics, sound management, preconditioning, tag identification and certification, plus a good marketing strategy. The order of the steps is not as important as doing the steps.

The first point is superior genetics. Calves are a product of a producer’s genetic program. The days have long passed when producers simply eyeball and guess what the genetic package is. The appropriate mix of growth and carcass genes that are achieved through proven sires is critical. A calf only will be what its genes allow it to be.

In the current world, fast-growing calves that have the genes to grade Choice and offer the feedlot some flexibility in marketing a very lean, heavy carcass would be very desirable.

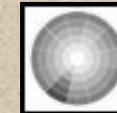
The second point is sound management. As a buyer who is about to write a check for \$900 calves, there is an expectation that these calves have been under the care of a good manager. It’s not in the bold print; it’s the fine print that acknowledges the presence of a good manager. A manager is someone who conducts business in a professional manner, pays attention to detail, has a broad grasp of the industry, has positive people skills, guides those who are supervised, and knows how to document and sell a program.

The third point is to have the calves preconditioned. Preconditioned calves are products of a complete health management program designed to minimize risk as the calves leave the home ranch to travel through the marketing channels and arrive at a backgrounder or feedlot. These calves must be accustomed to water troughs, feed bunks and timely vaccinations using recommended vaccines, treated for applicable parasites and fully processed (castration and dehorning).

The fourth point is tag identification. Calves need to be identified by a tag or a similar form of identification to allow



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for the proper acknowledgment of who that calf is. Not all calves are the same, and all calves do not measure up to standards. Those that do must be identified or, once unloaded into a pen of similar-colored calves, they all become average.

The fifth point is very much tied to the fourth point. Cattle that are seeking a premium must be certified and acknowledged as to who they are. The challenge is not a simple one. As the market gets more technical, the challenge becomes even greater. However, the difficulty does not remove the need to certify who the calf is. Call it the difference between generic versus name- brand marketing. The difference is in the name.

Point six is a good marketing strategy. Many would put this point as No. 1. However, endurance in a good marketing strategy depends on having a calf that has superior genetics, represents sound management practices and is preconditioned, tag identified and certified. The process of getting calves ready for market and capturing the available market dollars is not simple. In days past, calves usually were not handled or worked prior to shipping in the fall. Instead, they were gathered, sorted and hauled directly to the auction barn. Calves would not be separated from their mothers prior to the sale, so the bawling of freshly weaned calves echoed from the local sale barns. These calves did well, and many returned to the countryside for a more leisurely feeding period in smaller lots or pastures.

Today, the table has turned. Many calves compete to go directly to backgrounder lots or feed yards that are aggressively searching for feeder calves. In many ways, this final step is the culmination of genetic selection for growth and associated profitable carcass traits, the management needed to bring together the calves and crops produced, and the skills to gauge the availability of reasonably priced feed grains in sufficient quantities that facilitate the operation of large feed yards.

The demand is there. However, to stand at the entrance of a larger feedlot, with the constant flow of semitrucks loaded with feed or loaded with calves, and be able to say that I got my calves marketed right is tough. However, it can be done, as buyers have a few select orders that would offer a premium to fill a load or two of similar types of calves that truly are indicative of a premium.

Go for it because it can be done. Do not give into the mediocre. Instead, aggressively market your premium calves that excel through superior genetics and sound management, and are preconditioned, tag identified and certified to be the best there is. You can do it.

May you find all your ear tags.

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

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