

Working to Get More 'er' From the Calf Crop

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The envelope arrives with the mail and you are jittery as you open it and see how the steers did in the feed lot. This nervousness is natural because we are comparative creatures.

Words like bigger, larger, heavier, faster, slower, prettier, fatter, etc., are used repeatedly in the English language for the purpose of comparison. These words came into being for the specific purpose of expression, and ultimately to help us relay who got the big 'er.'

The North Dakota State University Dickinson Research Extension Center's steer report included two lots of cattle delivered last fall and measured under a complete electronic system. The genetic and management evaluation for the Center compared steers standing in the same lot, at the same time, receiving the same management.

Using the 'er' test, the results were interesting. The average daily gain was faster than the average steer, coming in at 3.25 pounds per day for both lots. In terms of total weight, our cattle were lighter. Average carcass weight was 735 for the first lot and 726 for the second lot. Being short on carcass weight is negative for profit, a point the Center needs to ponder.

Feed efficiency, another key to profit was a plus. The center's cattle had greater feed efficiency: the first lot coming in at 5.47 pounds of feed per pound of gain, and the second lot at 5.56 pounds of feed per pound of gain.

In terms of total cost per pound of gain and feed cost per pound of gain, the picture was not as clear. The first lot was cheaper for total costs, however the second lot was greater than the average lot. In terms of feed cost, both lots were cheaper than the average lot steers. Total costs and feed costs for lot one were \$53.70 and \$47.74 per hundredweight, respectively, and for lot two, \$55.88 and \$48.16 per hundredweight, respectively.

The lots actually split on profitability. The first lot had greater-than-average returns at \$68 per head, while the second lot had smaller-than-average net returns at \$46 dollars per head. The center's cattle are in the ballpark, however, less-than-average net return is not acceptable. Greater net return for all lots is the obvious goal.

So what is hidden in the data, detracting from net return? The first indication is to continue the 'er' approach and apply it to the carcass data, but that will need to be handled in next week's BeefTalk, because a quick review of the sheets highlights a very glaring profit taker.

Turning our attention to health, the first item is actual death rate. The first lot had a higher than average death rate at 1.2 percent and the second lot of calves had a lower than average death rate at 0. Neither death rate is alarming and both are in the acceptable limits.

The big flag comes when treatment costs are reviewed. Both lots had higher than average treatment costs, with the first lot coming in at \$6.77 per head and the second lot, a whopping \$9.56 per head. In general, adding both numbers to the Center's net profit line would be great. However, the cost of doing business sometimes necessitates unplanned-for expenses to meet the goal.

A thorough review is currently underway on what happened. More next time, as well as the carcass report card, which is great reading. May you find all your ear tags.

Your comments are always welcome at www.BeefTalk.com. For more information, contact the North Dakota Beef Cattle Improvement Association, 1133 State Avenue, Dickinson, ND 58601 or go to www.CHAPS2000.com on the Internet. In correspondence about this column, refer to BT0170.

Feedlot Report Card for 2002 Steer Calves

Traits	Lot 2369	Above or Below Average	Lot 2483	Above or Below Average
Average daily gain	3.25 lbs/day	above	3.25 lbs/day	above
Carcass weight	735 lbs	below	726 lbs	below
Feed efficiency	5.47 lbs/lb gain	above	5.56 lbs/lb gain	above
Total cost/lb gain	\$53.70 per cwt	above	\$55.88 per cwt	below
Feed cost/lb gain	\$47.74 per cwt	above	\$48.16 per cwt	above
Net return	\$68 per head	above	\$46 per head	below
Death rate	1.2%	below	0.0%	above
Treatment cost	\$6.77 per head	below	\$9.56 per head	below

Any trait that is below average would indicate a need for improvement.