

## Data Collected From Beef Cattle Is Good Only If Used

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Beef producers receive a lot of cattle closeouts during late summer. A large portion of the 2003 calf crop hit a marketable age in late spring to early summer. Feedlots are busy processing the cattle and the data associated with each pen.

The potential for expanding cattle tracking systems points to the critical need to understand data. Why generate data if it is not understood or made use of?

The argument could be made, from an industry stand point, that the data currently generated is not well utilized. Reams upon reams of data can be printed, sometimes on very attractive paper, but the utilization of that data may not be achieved.

In simple terms, did a data point cause a change in management? Did the data cause the producer to revisit bull selection criteria? There is a need to better understand the reams of numbers currently printed because the information will only get more complicated.

In grade school, math flash cards and multiplication tables were seldom recess activities. Arithmetic, commonly called math today, does not come naturally to many and beef cattle data is usually numbers.

Individual data is often the focus of discussion. We want to know how steer Y3128 or the calves from bull 127 did.

To better understand data, producers can begin by focusing on averages. An average number is a simple numeric way of defining or explaining a group of values. Weight seems to be the easiest trait to work with, primarily because the values are generally normally distributed.

Normal distribution is not something a producer has to lose any sleep over, but working with numbers is like any other field of expertise. There is help, so the producer needs to find knowledgeable expertise. Some things simply need to be left for others to worry about. By doing that, producers can do a better job of raising the best product available.

A quick review of a feedlot closeout should involve some common useable traits. Carcass weight seems to

be the major driver on pocket dollars.

A recent pen of 35 steers had an average hot carcass weight of 725 pounds. Is this an acceptable number? Where there bigger steers or smaller steers? In this case, the lower 20 percent, or seven steers, averaged 715 pounds and the upper 20 percent, or seven steers, averaged 776 pounds. Taking one trait at a time, the search is on for the value of a 725 pound hot carcass weight which is an effort to give meaning to the number.

In a quick review of Cattle-Fax data, several averages pop up on the Cattle-Fax web site, some in chart form and others in numeric form. The challenge is always the apple or orange problem. Are you comparing apples to apples or apples to oranges? On the Cattle-Fax web site, the simple weight number suddenly becomes many numbers. There are numbers for all cattle, steers, heifers, cows and bulls. Beef versus dairy numbers can also be found. There is also the perpetual problem of definition.

The report in hand says hot carcass weight; the comparative numeric numbers are average dressing weight, cold carcass weight or simply carcass weight. As with most decisions, time is critical. The industry number seems to be in the mid- to high-seven hundreds, the pen lot was 725 pounds.

There is no need to read the whole catalog. The bottom line on this pen lot, the cattle got fat before they reached allowable carcass weights. The net result was missed opportunity and missed dollars in a good market, a point made with data, real data generating directional change. The conclusion: use the data or don't collect it.

May you find all your USAIP ear tags.

Your comments are always welcome at [www.BeefTalk.com](http://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](http://www.CHAPS2000.com) on the Internet. In correspondence about this column, refer to BT0207.

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## What Does An Average Pen Hot Carcass Weight of 725 Pounds Mean?

- Missed opportunity
- Missed dollars in a good market