



## BeefTalk 602: Carcass Merit Pays

### SUPPORTING MATERIALS

# Pay Attention to Carcass Merit – IT PAYS!

Difference between marketing select beef versus the upper end of very high quality beef:

700-pound carcasses	\$161
800-pound carcasses	\$184
900-pound carcasses	\$207

Dickinson Research Extension Center harvested steers

*Producers should pay attention to how the calves perform in the feed yard and the type of carcasses that are hung up on the rail.*

At one time, the carcass that is on the rail had a home. At one point, a producer made the decision to mate cows to a particular bull. The steer calf that resulted from the mating spent his early life nursing on his mother and growing. Eventually, the calf was weaned, allowed to grow and moved through a feed yard to be finished.

The beef that the steer produced was a product of two distinct processes. The cow-calf producer determined the genetics, while the feed yard determined the final product.

That leads to a good question. Do high-quality carcasses come from the genetics of a cow-calf producer or the management of a good feed yard? The answer is both.

However, for today, let's look at the feed yard. Feed yards accumulate cattle for the specific purpose of finishing cattle. Finished cattle, or fat cattle in older terminology, are those cattle that are ready to be harvested.

Every calf that is born has an ideal end point. In other words, there is a point in every calf's life that if harvested at that point, the carcass would best represent the beef that meets consumer demand. That end point floats because consumer demand is variable. It depends on the current season and mood of those who are looking to eat beef.

Recently, the Dickinson Research Extension Center has been marketing the 2010 steer calves. Granted, the genetics of these steers was determined during the rough winter of 2009. The perusal of many sire catalogs, cash availability and eventual nods at the bull sale resulted in calves that were harvested in early January 2012.

That time delay directly impacts beef producers because the current bull selection and turnout seems more relevant than bull selection and turnout three years ago. Perhaps it simply needs to be stated that producers should pay



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attention to how the calves perform in the feed yard and the type of carcasses that are hung up on the rail.

For that to happen, there needs to be a relationship between the feed yard and harvester. Even more importantly, there needs to be a relationship between the people involved in the feed yard and the people involved with the harvesting process. The feed yard, not the producer, ultimately determines when the calves are ready for harvest. That decision is critical.

For example, we could use the steers that were slaughtered for the center. If the ideal end point is missed, significant dollars are left on the table. Some examples could be discussed based on the three lots of steers that the center harvested.

Based on an 800-pound carcass weight, let's say the steer missed the choice grade and ended up graded as select. Using the three lots as an example and rounding numbers to whole numbers, missing the choice grade decreased the value of an 800-pound carcass by \$64 with an \$8 choice select spread. It was \$88 with an \$11 choice select spread and \$120 with a \$15 choice select spread.

Applying those numbers to the lighter, 700-pound carcasses in the lots with the same range in choice select spread, the decreased value would be \$56, \$77 and \$105.

If the heavier, 900-pound carcasses are looked at, the decreased value would be \$72, \$99 and \$135 as the choice select spread increases.

If the steers hit the upper two-thirds choice grade but were, in reality, sold early and graded select, one could have added another missed opportunity of \$21 for the 700-pound carcasses, \$24 for the 800-pound carcasses and \$27 for the 900-pound carcasses.

Let's really get out on the limb and say the steers could have graded prime but were marketed early and only graded out as select. In this case, the mistake would have additional lost revenue for the owner of the cattle, which is us, of \$84 on the 700-pound carcasses, \$96 on the 800-pound carcasses and a whopping \$108 on the 900-pound carcasses.

At least for these three sets of finished steers, based on what we know of quality grades and consumer demand for quality beef, the difference between marketing select beef versus the upper end of very high-quality grades on the 700-, 800- and 900-pound carcasses, based on an \$11 choice select spread, was \$161, \$184 and \$207.

Big numbers are perhaps a little bit hypothetical but are very real. For producers, the bottom line is to pay attention to carcass merit because it pays.

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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