A Tale of Four Calves; Retain Common Sense

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BEEFTALK

This is the time of year when carcass data starts to come in on last year's calf crop. The data also provides reflection material on the current bull battery. In the past, the conventional wisdom was that growth was the most important trait. Cow-calf producers, however, know many traits affect the bottom line.

Data has shown growth alone, with no monitoring of the end package, simply produces an unpalatable product. In addition, even growth calves need to be alive after birth. Just this week a producer called concerning calving difficulty, which was becoming more apparent within the cow-herd, especially with a labor shortage.

In this particular case, the bulls were selected for a carcass program that favored growth and muscle. There was no selection emphasis placed on calving ease or birth weight. The result was predictable: The producer met the grid specs, the calves grew well, but the dead calf pile was simply getting too large. The pasture was becoming spotted with lonely mother cows.

A balanced approach always has been the best formula for beef producers. Interestingly, even with balanced programs, the differences among calves are not always black and white. Data has shown that many bulls can turn a profit.

The following is a tale of four Dickinson Research Extension Center calves, valued at just around $1,100 on the rail. They gained their value by different means.

The calves represent four types of calves, two yield-grade 3 calves grading choice or select, and two yield-grade 2 calves grading choice or select. Yield-grade 3 calves have more fat on the carcass and slightly less rib eye (an indicator of red meat) in relation to their carcass weight. The yield-grade 2 calves are reflective of more rib eye per pound of carcass weight and have less fat trim.

The palatability of the choice-quality grade cattle would be greater than select. The select grade would have less evidence of intramuscular fat.

Calf 4102 was a yield-grade 3 calf, with more trimable fat, less rib eye per pound of carcass weight and a rib eye with less evidence of intramuscular fat with a select quality grade.

Calf 4102 weighed 1,229 pounds out of the feed yard and had a 765-pound hot carcass weight. The rib eye area was 12.6 square inches, less than the 13 square inches needed based on the carcass weight. The calf sold on the rail at $1,098.54.

Calf 4062 also was a yield-grade 3 calf and graded choice, indicative of better palatability. Calf 4062 weighed 1,178 pounds out of the feed yard and had a 727-pound hot carcass weight. The rib eye area was 10.3 square inches, less than the 12.5 square inches needed based on the carcass weight. The calf sold on the rail for $1,083.88.

Calves 4119 and 3242 were yield-grade 2, with a larger rib eye area in proportion to their carcass weight and had less external fat. Calf 4119 weighed 1,101 pounds out of the feed yard and had a 743-pound hot carcass weight. The rib eye area was 12.7 square inches, which is the amount needed based on the carcass weight. The calf was a quality-grade select and sold on the rail for $1,096.67.

In contrast, Calf 3242 had a higher quality grade. Calf 3242 weighed 1,176 pounds out of the feed yard and had a 752-pound hot carcass weight. The rib eye area was 13.7 square inches and the carcass, based on weight, needed 12.8 square inches. The calf sold on the rail at $1,119.35.

Although the sale date significantly impacts price and the bottom line, there are many ways to make money in the beef business, just don't abandon all ranch common sense.

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 BT0244.

The Tale of Four Calves

Calf	Live Weight	Quality Grade	Yield Grade	Rail Value
4102	1,229	Select	3	$1,098.54
4062	1,178	Choice	3	$1,083.88
4119	1,101	Select	2	$1,096.67
3242	1,176	Choice	2	$1,119.35