Make Way for the Little Guy, He's Paying His Bills

By Kris Ringwall
Extension Beef Specialist
NDSU Extension Service

The beef business could be called a very static business in some respects. Granted, the world of politics certainly keeps life interesting and the daily markets are far from constant. However, in the big picture, individual beef operations do not change much from year to year.

The cows usually calve at the same time and the pasture choice seldom changes. The bulls change somewhat, but for the most part, producers are very comfortable buying bulls as repeat customers. The core of a beef operation is the beef cow. Frankly, when a cow is calving on time, without difficulty and bringing in a 500- to 600-pound-plus calf in the fall, who really wants to change much?

However, living things do change and selection within a breed of cattle will change the genetics available for use in the commercial cow sector. This is what keeps the manager of a cow business astute and why deciphering what breed to use and subsequently selecting and buying bulls is a huge component of managing a beef production system.

Once bulls are purchased, the process of deciding what bulls go to what cows is critical. Recently the Dickinson Research Extension Center, in the pursuit of expanded understanding within the beef business, started breeding the heifers to Loala bulls, Low-lines of Australia. The three bulls were sons of Quartermaster Q117, who had an 11.46 square inch rib eye at 684 pounds at 14 months of age, measured 39.5 inches tall and weighed 1,120 pounds at 30 months of age, according to American Loala Management LLC.

The last weight on these three center bulls was 1,105, 1,125 and 1,170 pounds. All scored a condition score of 7. The bulls were born in spring 2000, with births weights of 50, 47 and 51 pounds and had adjusted weaning weights of 330, 343 and 324 pounds in late September and early October 2000.

The bulls were 2 years old when the center obtained them and this will be their third turn out. As noted earlier, change is not easy and speed is not an asset when making change. The center simply was exploring a breed of cattle that potentially would modify the frame score of the mature cows.

The first step was preliminary, the heifers calved the way they should and had no calving problems associated with heavy birth weights. The calves were weaned with the other calves, with an average weaning weight of 500 pounds at 233 days of age.

The steer calves were held over as yearlings and sent to the feedlot in the fall. The note on the closeout summed it up: "These cattle were very interesting." The steers arrived at the feedlot with a pay weight of 945 pounds, spent 85 days on feed and had an average sale weight of 1,186 pounds. The lot went 77.3 percent choice-quality grade or better, with 31.8 percent yield grade 2, 54.5 percent yield grade 3 and 13.6 percent yield grade 4.

The steers met the required amount of rib eye area per hundredweight of carcass and netted back more than $2.27 per hundredweight in carcass premiums. There was very little choice or select spread when these steers were marketed.

The bottom line is the calves did not have health problems and zero dollars were invested in treatments. They sold for an average of $1,093 per head. Feed yard costs averaged $168 per head, so the steers netted back $925.

It is safe to say that utilizing these Loala bulls as calving-ease sires was not a mistake. There is still much to be learned, particularly with integrating the crossbred Loala heifers into the cowherd, but for now, the center simply is cashing the check.

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 BT0245.

Carcass Value of DREC Steers Sired by Full-blooded Loalas

Average value per carcass	$1,093
Average feed yard costs per steer	$168
Average net value back to the ranch	$925