

## The Sum of the Parts Makes Up the Whole

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The world of data can be challenging, especially connecting the data to meaningful management decisions. The sum of the parts may make up the whole, but singling out data can send mixed signals.

One of the jobs at the Dickinson Research Extension Center is to collect data. The real test in data usage involves the logical application of the data, which requires scientists to transfigure, analyze and apply to questions for answers.

The beef industry today is on the verge of creating a large data (number) gathering machine that simply may gather masses of data with little relevant or logical application. A recent review of 2004 carcass data from the six DREC lots on feed illustrates the point very well.

Upon review of five traits individually, the data seemed to be somewhat discouraging. The first trait was feed efficiency. Data show five of the six lots were below average. The below-average lot averages were 7.60, 6.57, 6.38, 5.79 and 5.76 pounds of dry matter fed per pound of gain. The one above-average lot averaged 5.16 pounds of dry matter per pound of gain. This was not starting out very good, since feed efficiency is a huge indicator of profitability in the feed yard.

The next data subset was treatment cost per head. The same trend was true. Five lots at \$17.80, \$15.16, \$14.61, \$12.48 and \$5.16 per head, respectively, were below average. The one lot above average had no per-head treatment cost. The one lot was great, but again there was disappointment with the other lots.

A review of total cost of gain repeated the story. There were five below-average lots at \$67.21, \$59.12, \$58.81, \$56.01 and \$53.58 per hundredweight of gain. The single above average lot came in at \$48.83 per hundredweight of gain.

Gloom and doom was evident and this kind of data can cause one to abandon the ship and try for better seas, but steering the course, provided a course was mapped, still needs to be maintained.

Carcass weight, another well-known figure for driving feedlot profit, was the next data subset reviewed. In

this case, only two of the lots were below average. The two lots averaged 684 and 756 pounds. Four lots finally showed some positive data, averaging 795, 788, 805 and 833 pounds on the rail. There was a reason to smile, but heavy carcass weight can multiply loss as well as profit.

Resorting to one of the concluding numbers, actually a new number on the closeout sheets, net return to the ranch was printed for each lot. Interestingly, the numbers were now reversed and five of the lots were above average. Topping the list was a lot with a net return to the ranch of \$925, followed by \$883, \$857, \$815 and \$803 per head. The one lot that was below average came in with a \$724 per head net return to the ranch.

Analyzing and applying the data is the next step. Coffee time may be the most appropriate time to really sit down and ask just what the data is saying. One obvious outcome, as is often noted, is that the truth really can be stretched from any data set. Relating one particular data point to a trend and then projecting out the results can be very dangerous.

In this case, the logical data points indicating the performance of the steers did not hold up. Other opportunities seemed to drive the end values; however, think about the opportunities to improve the below-average values and the subsequent impact on per head net return to the ranch.

The ranch in treatment costs per head alone moved the net return per head from zero to \$17.80. That can be a lot of cash on a truckload of calves. The bottom line is that the sum of the parts equals the whole, but be careful pulling out the parts.

May you find all your NAIS-approved 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 BT0276.

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## Feedlot Performance for Steer Calves Born in 2005

Dickinson Research Extension Center

Lot	Feed Efficiency (lbs DM/lb gain)	Treatment Cost per Head	Total Cost of Gain (\$ per hundred weight of gain)	Carcass Weight	Net Return to the Ranch*
4359	5.76 -	\$14.61 -	\$53.58 -	684 -	\$724 -
4424	5.16 +	\$17.80 -	\$48.83 +	795 +	\$803 +
4425	7.60 -	\$00.00 +	\$67.21 -	756 -	\$925 +
4528	6.57 -	\$05.16 -	\$58.81 -	805 +	\$857 +
4557	5.79 -	\$12.48 -	\$56.01 -	833 +	\$883 +
4562	6.38 -	\$15.16 -	\$59.12 -	788 +	\$815 +

+ indicates above average and - indicates below average

\* Dollar value of finished animal minus costs incurred at feedlot.