Feedlot Data Linked to Quality Data on the Rail

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One of the biggest challenges for beef producers is to engage the data they collect within their operations. Even the simple process of using data to affirm and sustain current management and breeding efforts is difficult. The concept of using data to cause change is scary and foreign to many.

The Dickinson Research Extension Center has retained data for all steer calves since 1997. Each year's data is always fun to evaluate. It is important to evaluate data in a manner that makes sense. Statistical methods applied to the data are important, but not at the expense of losing the logic for the producer.

Initially, the feedlot data should be placed in common sense groupings to see if anything important jumps out. In 2005, five of the lots of calves born or purchased were above the feedlot average in returning money back to the ranch. One of the lots was below average.

The above-average lots started at $925 per head net return to the ranch, followed by $883, $857, $815 and $803 per head. The one lot that was below average came in at $724-per-head net return to the ranch. The average net return was $757. Finding the traits that linked positively to the overall dollar return to the ranch is not simple, but starting with one logical trait helps to, at least, generate some points to think about.

For today, the concept of quality comes to mind. The quality grades of beef are traits that have been talked about for years. The fact is well-established that various genetics are available to produce cattle that have a greater percentage of Choice grade versus those breeds that are noted for producing a greater percentage of Select grade cattle.

Depending on the current price and marketing options, the values associated with quality traits will vary from season to season. Cattle that have excelled in quality are those cattle that are predicted to be more palatable, based on maturity indicators of the carcass, as well as the amount and distribution of the intramuscular fat evident in the ribeye.

A closer look at the data shows that of the six lots the center had on feed quality did have some impact on the net return back to the ranch. Lot 4425 returned the most dollars back to the ranch. This lot also had the greatest percentage of Choice steer calves (77.3 percent) and the least percentage of Select steer calves (22.7 percent).

Lot 4557 was also above average in percentage Choice steer calves (43.7 percent), followed by lot 4528, with 45.6 percent of Choice steers, and lot 4562, with 51.8 percent of Choice steers. This is not an exhaustive statistical exercise, but the top four lots for net return to the center were all above average in the percentage of steer calves that graded Choice.

The fifth lot of calves was below average in the percentage of Choice steer calves (21.7 percent). However, the lot was still an above-average lot in net return to the center.

Lot 4359 was below average in net return to the center. This set of calves had obvious difficulties. Only 17.9 percent graded Choice and 64.3 percent graded Select. A dismal 17.9 percent of Lot 4359 was side railed to the no-roll section in the packing plant. (No-rolls are cattle that are not graded because the apparent quality is not evident in the meat. No-rolls are sold without placing an official USDA grading stamp on the carcass.)

The bottom line is obvious: Carcass quality has an impact on the value of cattle.

May you find all your NAIS-approved 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 w*ww.CHAPS2000.com* on the Internet. In correspondence about this column, refer to BT0277.

Feedlot Performance for Steer Calves Born in 2004

Dickinson Research Extension Center

Lot	Percent Prime	Percent Choice	Percent Select	Percent No-rolls	Net Return to the Ranch
4359	00.0 -	17.9 -	64.3 -	17.9 +	$724 -
4424	00.0 -	21.7 -	73.9 +	04.3 +	$803 +
4425	00.0 -	77.3 +	22.7 -	00.0 -	$925 +
4528	01.5 +	45.6 +	52.9 -	00.0 -	$857 +
4557	00.0 -	43.7 +	54.7 -	01.6 -	$883 +
4562	03.7 +	51.8 +	44.4 -	00.0 -	$815 +

+ indicates above average and - indicates below average