

BeefTalk 775: Pounds, Efficiency, Quality

Pounds, efficiency and quality are important components of the beef business.

The subject of pounds is a continual discussion within the beef business.

Efficiency is another subject of continual discussion within the beef business. Quality also is an issue of a continual discussion within the beef business.

Pounds, efficiency and quality are three simple words, but in reality, there is nothing simple about understanding these three words. Many producers see understanding pounds as simple: Produce the maximum possible. But living things do not do well at the extremes, so maximum brings additional problems.

In the simplest form, think of the ranch dog. Those really small dogs may seem neat but may have a multitude of additional problems, and those really large dogs tend to have longevity issues. So most likely, the ranch dog is a mid-sized dog. Pounds really do not describe an effective ranch dog. But we do not sell dogs by the pound, either, but we sell calves by the pound.

Geneticists repeatedly remind us that “like begets like,” so if the parents are big, so are the offspring, and if the parents are small, so are the offspring. So big cows and big bulls produce big calves. Small cows and small bulls produce small calves.

Understanding how pounds occur is important for the average cattle producer. At some point in time, even if the calves have left the ranch, someone will need to evaluate pounds. At any given time, more pounds times the price per pound will yield more dollars. But even that equation is flawed because smaller calves bring more dollars per pound; thus, we have the concept of a negative price slide in relationship to heavier pounds.

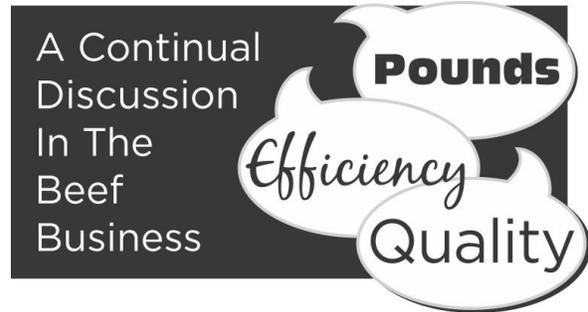
The evaluation of a ranch unit simply based on average pounds of calf is flawed. However, the weight of a calf is a fairly easy number to work with and certainly will be part of most selection criteria. Bull-buying equations should include some aspect of birth weight, weaning weight and yearling weight.

And without a doubt, selection for the largest calf is easy. In fact, one does not actually need a scale because visual evaluation of body weight is something most producers can master. But just like the ranch dog, something in the middle is probably the best. Functionality of the total package is critical because even a lame ranch dog may not avoid the harshness of a working herd of cattle.

Unfortunately, there always will be a tug of war between those who focus on pastures and those who focus on pens. That being said, and having answered nothing, why not talk about efficiency? This is a horrible number to work with because, unlike pounds, there always will need to be a denominator in the equation, thus two numbers. And in reality, misunderstanding of what the number means once the equation is calculated is common.

We struggle with numbers, and we really struggle with equations. Starting with addition, that makes sense. As we add subtraction, we can handle that. We come to appreciate multiplication as we sell pounds for a set price. That makes sense and we actually get a paycheck for that calculation.

But division, the process that forces us to put one number over another number and then divide - we usually skip that one. And let's not mention the fact that we get led down the path of exponential numbers. Well, that is efficiency, so any good coffee shop talk actually can have several outcomes, all of which will make sense to someone, maybe.



But efficiency and division are real and provide real guidance to the management of cattle. Those who actually will master the fourth mathematical function, or at least find a friend who can, will be set up better in the world of cattle management.

As we are pondering efficiency and pounds, someone always will throw in the fact that if you can't eat the beef, why raise the beef? No one really argues that point because taste and product acceptance at the dinner table drive beef consumption. But if efficiency is hard to measure and understand, how do muscle tenderness, taste panels and multigenerational family recipes produce a selection criteria applicable to the process of improving cattle management?

Some might take the approach that if you raise it, a chef can figure out how to cook it, but no, most farm families already know that if you are going to harvest a beef, harvest something you can eat - and enjoy. Beef, prepared solely as beef, is still the meal of choice, with nothing added.

So there is not a simple solution to those three words: pounds, efficiency and quality. Beef producers will need to struggle with the outcome of matching these three words to individual beef operations. Perhaps the word "independent" would fit nicely here because the uniqueness of each beef operation ultimately will put meaning to these words. Discussion is good.

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.