



# Beef Logic

► by R.A. "Bob" Long

## A need for carcass composition changes

*Speakers at the recent 2001 National Angus Conference predicted a rapid expansion of the packing industry's move to case-ready products, then challenged breeders to prepare immediately for the inevitable changes in carcass composition requirements.*

*Case-ready products are merely closely trimmed, boneless retail cuts that are packaged and ready for the retailer to place in the meatcase.*

### The transition

Historically, packers shipped whole carcasses to the retail store. There the butcher prepared each retail cut, held it up for the customer's approval, weighed and priced it, wrapped it in butcher paper and handed it over the counter. Success required each store to employ trained meat cutters who had sales personalities.

Other problems included the disposal or utilization of waste fat and bone remaining after fabrication of retail cuts, tools for fabrication, refrigeration for hanging carcasses, and a never-ending requirement for attention to the appearance and sanitation of all meat-handling facilities.

Next, large retailers (chain stores) established central cutting stations where carcasses were at least partially reduced to retail cuts before shipment to retail stores. Packers then began to ship wholesale cuts rather than whole carcasses and progressed to boning lines where cuts were trimmed, boned and boxed.

Finally, the move is to complete case-ready products. The packer trims, bones, cuts to individual serving size, packages complete with cooking instructions and, in

some cases, cooks and freezes. The retailer simply displays the package and collects the payment.

### Emphasis on yield

With complete fabrication at the packer level, it is a small wonder that packers are concerned with retail cut yield. One look at the tons of waste fat and bone prompts the hunt for leaner carcasses with high muscle-to-bone ratios.

Beef must be tender, juicy and flavorful to command consumer acceptance. Further, it should be obvious to every thinking person that — among carcasses of equal eating quality — the leaner, more heavily muscled carcasses yield a higher percentage of edible meat and are therefore more valuable.

Seedstock and commercial breeders need to accept the fact that current beef carcasses in this country are too fat and deficient in muscling. Both the Beef Quality Audit (BQA) in the early 1970s and the 1992 BQA revealed this fact.

The USDA yield grading standards point out the difference in value in the following example. Three steer carcasses, each weighing 750 pounds (lb.), with a quality

grade of U.S. Choice were boned, trimmed and processed for boneless, boxed beef. The results were as follows:

Yield Grade	Fat, lb.	Bone, lb.	Salable Product, lb.	Value, \$
1.5	97	103	537	871
2.5	125	104	504	813
3.5	149	102	481	773

Many industry representatives, myself included, have demonstrated the importance of carcass composition to cattlemen all over this country and throughout the cattle-producing countries of the world. This column has discussed the problem and what to do about it in 1992, 1995, 1996, 1997 and 1999.

At the 2001 National Angus Conference several speakers pointed out the problem and predicted the discounting of Yield Grade (YG) 3 carcasses.

Research data overwhelmingly supports the fact that genetic potential is the only logical way to control carcass size, quality and yield of edible portion.

### Conclusion

Value-based marketing dictates that seedstock producers need to give greater emphasis to carcass characteristics in selection programs. This requires data — complete, accurate data recorded from contemporary groups of the same age, sex and treatment, at the same time and at the same place, including reference sires. All animals in the herd must be included, and the only way to accomplish this is with ultrasound.

Further, total efficiency requires selection for all production traits, as well as for body composition. The American Angus Association has the tools, the know-how and the world's largest data bank to help you do the job. Collect these records, and use them.

Bill Mies, in his remarks at the 2001 conference, said it best:

*"Data is not a trophy to be held up for admiration. It is a tool to be used to manage a beef operation more effectively."*

Let's get on with it.

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### We welcome your input

"Beef Logic" and "Breeders' Forum" serve as platforms for Angus breeders and industry experts to express their opinions on current issues and topics of breed improvement.

E-mail your comments to

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