



Decatur County Feed Yard — Setting the Pace

by Kelly Elkins & Jenny Stickle

Decatur County Feed Yard is clearly a beef industry pacesetter in the drive toward value-based marketing. It is the host feedyard for both the Certified Angus Beef Program's Value Discovery Project and the National Cattlemen's Association Strategic Alliance program.

Warren Weibert, co-owner and manager, and his staff are providing critical avenues for producer education.

Located near the northwestern Kansas town of Oberlin, Decatur County Feed Yard has access to an ample supply of corn from Kansas and Nebraska. In addition, close proximity to competing packers in Kansas, Nebraska and Colorado allows the feedyard the flexibility of marketing finished cattle to the best possible market. These factors combine to make an ideal location for value-based marketing projects.

The location is just one factor that makes Decatur County Feed Yard a pacesetter. Immaculate facilities and a total quality management philosophy also play key roles in its success. Built in 1971, the yard had an original capacity of 18,000 head. Improvements have created

a current capacity of 24,000 head.

Like any leading business, Decatur County Feed Yard is customer-driven. Individual attention, financing and risk management are a few of the services Weibert offers to his varied clientele.

Progressive feed and health programs are also implemented at Decatur County Feed Yard. All feed stuffs and rations are

wally Koers, of Salina, Kansas. Dr. Koers analyzes weekly feed assays and monitors the overall feeding performance on a daily basis. To achieve a cost-effective health program, the feedyard consults with veterinarian Dr. Del Miles and works daily with Dr. Jim Sears. The health program is continually modified to most effectively use health care products.

"Along with the busy day-to-day activities that must be handled, we are involved in projects that will help the beef industry focus on what it's trying to accomplish," says Weibert.

He believes the CAB Value Discovery Project offers producers an inexpensive way to experience retained ownership. "Basically, producers have the opportunity to learn all they want, from feedlot procedures to complete carcass data on their cattle. It's an excellent way to help producers focus on and understand beef industry goals," says Weibert.

While great benefits to the beef industry are realized through these special projects, Decatur County Feed Yards involvement requires a tremendous amount of time, extra work and recordkeeping. The cattle entered in



routinely analyzed to maintain high quality and consistency. The rations are formulated by consulting nutritionist Dr.

BEEF PRODUCERS SHARE EXPECTATIONS OF VALUE DISCOVERY PROJECT

Barbara Downey, Downey Ranches, Wamego, Kan., is participating in the CAB Value Discovery Project for the second year in a row. After entering 12 head of cattle in the 1992 event she increased the number to 30 for this year's project. Downey entered the Value Discovery Project to simply gather information about her cattle.

"The Value Discovery Project allows me to send a variety of calves weighing from 570 to 750 pounds to the feedlot where they will be fed and processed at an ideal time based on project procedures, I believe value-based marketing is coming, and we want to be ready when it happens," Downey explains.

Alfred Smith, farm activities specialist for the Alternate Energy Resource Department of Texaco, Inc., Buffalo, Wyo., is a first time participant.

"The ranch wants to obtain information about feed conversion and carcass evaluation," Smith says. "This type of information will be used as a marketing tool within the operation."

R.D. Blakeslee of Argobrite Angus, Union W. Va., has entered each of the three years the program has been in existence. His motives for entering the project lie in trying to identify independent

bloodlines that have high carcass qualities which will become highly predictable.

"I believe we need to identify cattle with different sire lines that excel in carcass merit," Blakeslee says.

From a smaller producer's standpoint, Blakeslee hasn't found any other program which allows a producer to put together a small number of cattle and get the type of detailed information he has received the past three years.

"I couldn't receive this information any other way, Programs like this are absolutely essential," says Blakeslee.

Sam Hands, Triangle H Grain and Cattle Company, Garden City, Kan., believes providing high quality beef to the consumer is extremely important. Because Hands' operation includes a feedlot, his focus regarding the project is geared toward discovering how his cattle fit into the CAB Program.

"I want to find out the genetic capabilities of the cattle in relation to the CAB Program specifications," says Hands. "Our goal is to kill cattle at a younger age and still produce well-marbled carcasses, so we need to identify sires who can help achieve this."

CERTIFIED ANGUS BEEF

the CAB Value Discovery Project are individually weighed twice, once for an initial weight and approximately two weeks later for an official, on-test weight. Generally, feedyards do not take the time to individually weigh cattle but take an average lot weight upon arrival and an average lot weight at shipping time.

Due to the different geographic origins of the project cattle, increased health risks are a potential problem. For this reason, special care is taken to watch these designated cattle for any sign of health problems.

Weibert believes the extra effort and time invested in these projects is valuable to both the industry and feedyard. The operation benefits through increased exposure and all producers involved benefit from Weibert's sincere interest and willingness to share his feeding expertise.

The CAB Program salutes Decatur County Feed Yard for its outstanding cooperation and commitment to setting a progressive pace for the beef industry. Interested Angus producers are invited to visit Decatur County Feed Yard to view the cattle entered in the 1993 CAB Value Discovery Project firsthand.