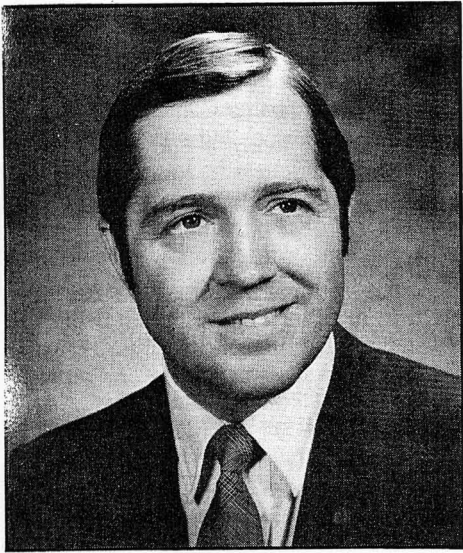


from the office

LEAD IN

By Richard Spader
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Hold your hat! A new idea for the constructive revision of USDA beef grading standards was introduced at the NCA Convention in Las Vegas in January that deserves our attention. The idea, and at this point it is nothing more, was presented by Dr. John Forrest, Purdue University.

Forrest told those attending the convention that there appears to be four alternatives for beef grading.

- 1—The industry can maintain the current system.
- 2—Beef grading could be eliminated entirely.
- 3—The industry could agree on revised grade descriptions and requirements.
- 4—Replace the present system with a classification plan that identifies individual value-determining traits of beef, without putting the individual carcass into any specific grade such as Choice or Prime.

The fourth alternative is the one recommended by Forrest and his special NCA committee. In effect, it would do what beef grading was originally designed to do, that is rate individual carcasses on value—determining factors, and then let the industry select the kind of carcasses they want to merchandise.

The way the system would work is fairly simple. Each factor that contributes to the value of a beef carcass (marbling, maturity, fat thickness, post mortem treatment such as electrical stimulation, and defects such as color) would be evaluated along with yield grade, much as carcasses are evaluated now.

But, instead of then grouping carcasses into rather arbitrary grades as we do now, each factor would be included in one of four or five slots in a special USDA grading stamp. Yield grade or percent of lean would be in-

cluded on a separate stamp.

With this classification system the buyer would specify the product he wanted, e.g. modest marbling, A maturity, .3 inch of fat cover or less and yield grade 2, then he and the seller would negotiate a price based upon these factors.

The committee said, and it does seem logical, that this classification system would allow consumers to reflect those beef characteristics they like best. Carcasses that had the most desirable characteristics, based upon consumer demand, would theoretically be rewarded with the highest price per pound.

Although it is strictly a recommendation at this time, the system is one that deserves serious consideration by all of us in the Angus industry. It is obvious Angus cattle have the genetic ability to produce superior carcasses in both quality and composition. We need a grading program that identifies these superior characteristics precisely and lets their merit be reflected in the market place.

For too many years each grade change brought about a de-emphasis of marbling as a quality indicator. We saw lower and lower quality beef pushed into the Choice grade until that grade became of little value. Today in St. Joseph, Mo., for example, it is difficult to buy a piece of beef in the grocery store that carries any USDA grade shield.

Under Dr. Forrest's proposed system it appears the advantages of Angus carcasses would be identified and sold at a premium. We probably are a long way from adopting this or any similar proposal. And, while the American Angus Assn. is not endorsing this or any other change in the grading system at the present time, it should not be dismissed without a great deal of study and consideration. **AJ**