

# LEAD IN

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The term "heavy cattle" is taking on a new meaning these days. Once it was only to describe over-fat cattle. Today it often has nothing to do with over-feeding, but rather describes cattle that are just too large, and maybe not properly finished to boot.

A recent edition of "Cattle Buyers Weekly," a marketing and business newsletter, reports that loads of exotic cattle from Nebraska and Iowa yards weighed 1,300 pounds and more. "Buyers backed away from them early in the week," the newsletter said. "They blamed breeding and type rather than over-feeding."

More and more packers are selective in the breeding of cattle they purchase for slaughter, and by the same token, cattle feeders are becoming more discriminating in their purchases. That's not to say that neither the packer nor feeder will buy anything that comes along if the price is right. There is money to be made in any kind of cattle if they are bought cheap enough. But if cattle producers want to make a profit, it is vital that they know the kind of cattle that are preferred by feedlot operators and packers. And, of course, the kind of cattle they prefer are the kind that are most readily bought by the consumer.

Through research done just a few years ago, the consumer told the beef industry that they prefer lean beef that tastes good. Many want lean beef that tastes great. As Jeff Savell wrote in a recent edition of *The National Cattleman*, "The industry needs to produce cattle with more muscle, less external fat and seam fat, and maintain the same level of quality-marbling we have today."

The same article does contain an understandable mistake. It reads, "Outside fat and marbling are not highly related. That is why it's not uncommon to find Choice Yield Grade 2 carcasses in the same cooler with Standard Yield Grade 3 carcasses."

The facts are that outside fat and marbling are not closely related in Angus cattle but very definitely are in other breeds. Research done some years ago at Kansas State University shows that the relationship definitely varies between breeds.

About the tests, a Kansas State University extension news release reported, "Angus showed the least relationship between marbling and outside fat," according to Dr. Dell Allen. "Next came Short-horn and the Angus-Hereford crossbreeds Herefords followed. And most relationships came in Charolais and Charolais crossbreeds.

"Dr. Allen explains that Angus cattle apparently have a genetic advantage for marbling, regardless of outside fat. All breeds show marbling, but in some it takes more outside fat to provide it, he adds, and possibly more time in the feedlot. And some need to be fed to an older age to insure marbling."

Most researchers today are quick to point out that there is more difference within breeds of cattle than difference between breeds of cattle. One reason some use this dodge is because any mention that one breed has a distinct advantage over another automatically brings a strong response from the offended breed or breeds. But the fact remains that if cow-calf operators wish to produce cattle that will grade USDA Choice minus or better with Yield Grade 3, or better yet 2, carcasses, then those cattle will need to be at least half Angus.

That's not to say that we in the Angus business can sit back and reap the benefits of our breed. There are very real differences within our breed. Structured sire evaluation tests, and private feedlot tests, have shown differences in the ability of Angus bulls to sire a high percentage of calves that will grade USDA Choice at acceptable weights and yield grades. Never mind that the worst Angus is equal to or better than the best of most other breeds.

This is why the American Angus Assn. has started the Certified Angus Feeder program. Through it we will identify bulls that are outstanding in their ability to sire calves that yield high quality, well-marbled carcasses with minimum fat cover. More than ever before, we will be able to assure commercial cow-calf producers that the Angus bulls they buy will perform in the feedlot and on the rail.

Indeed, it is comforting that the beef cattle industry is coming to realize the need for quality beef. It is also comforting to see that the "elephants" of the cattlefeedyard have indeed had their day, and are now being discounted by the packer, But it is no time for us to become complacent. If we avoid the temptation, we can count on solid growth and acceptance of the Angus breed well into the 21st Century.