



# Beef Logic

► by R.A. "Bob" Long

## Judge certification

*My April "Beef Logic" column implied that current showing judging has failed to identify desirable beef cattle body composition and could result in the loss of the Angus breed's dominance of the beef industry. I also mentioned the possibility of using only judges who have formally demonstrated their ability to estimate accurately live beef cattle body composition.*

*The procedure for establishing a prospective judge's proficiency could be similar to that currently used to certify ultrasound technicians and approved by the Beef Improvement Federation (BIF) in 1997.*

### Certified technicians

Individuals wishing to become certified ultrasound technicians bring real-time ultrasound equipment and gather at a major land-grant university that has agreed to host a proficiency test. Attendance is limited to the technicians attempting certification, faculty and support staff of the hosting institution, and any invited industry personnel (usually breed association representatives).

Twenty cattle of slaughter age and weight are permanently identified by tattoo, assigned a temporary ear tag number and clipped at the appropriate area for measuring at the 12th-13th rib and rump area. Each technician is allowed a maximum of three minutes per animal to complete the measurement.

Next, the temporary identification (ID) numbers are changed, the cattle are presented in a different order, and the technician measures each animal again. This procedure is repeated until the technician

has measured each animal four times. The technicians then interpret the data for ribeye area (REA), 12th-13th rib fat thickness, rump fat thickness and percentage intramuscular fat.

The cattle are then slaughtered, and trained, experienced personnel collect the carcass data. Then a ¼-inch cross section of the ribeye at the 12th rib is chemically analyzed to establish percentage intramuscular fat.

Each technician's predictions are analyzed statistically for accuracy and repeatability and must meet certain standards for certification.

Finally, a written examination is given to test basic knowledge of ultrasonic technology, its application in scanning live cattle and the use of ultrasonic measures by the beef industry for genetic improvement.

The result is a set of technicians whose estimates of fat thickness, REA and marbling in live cattle from contemporary groups can be added to the breed's database with confidence. This is extremely

important in view of the ever-increasing emphasis on individual body composition in determining the value of slaughter cattle. Value-based marketing is here to stay.

### Show judges

Since cattle shows influence breed ideals and the breeding decisions of exhibitors and spectators alike, it seems important that the judges making the placings also should be "certified" as to their ability to identify desirable body composition of live cattle and to understand its importance.

Why not ask prospective judges to publicly demonstrate the ability to evaluate accurately the composition of live cattle? They cannot be expected to "see" marbling, but they should be able to identify muscling and fatness.

Show them 20 head of slaughter cattle including Yield Grades (YGs) 1, 2, 3 and 4, and have them write down estimates of fat thickness, REA and yield grade. Approve those who can do the job. Disqualify the rest and those who refuse to expose proficiency or lack thereof.

Such a test, along with a written examination on the collection and use of complete performance data, surely would change current showing placings for the better.

Perhaps the first step should be a series of seminars involving the visual appraisal of live slaughter cattle followed by slaughter and carcass evaluation open to all breeders and feeders — both seedstock and commercial. Such programs would emphasize the need for attention to carcass characteristics in beef production and convey methods for improving the same. Think about it, and express your opinion to others in the industry.

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### We welcome your input

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

#### Send, fax or e-mail your comments to

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