

# That's for Schurr

by Jerilyn Johnson

**Editors's Note:** John Schurr, one of 120 consignors in the Certified Angus Beef Feedlot Gain & Carcass Contest, is the subject of our feature story. Schurr is manager of Schurrtop Ranch, a purebred Angus and Charolais operation near Farnam, Nebraska.

In part I you read about Schurr's experience and successful track record in feedlot-carcass contests. Schurr agreed to share his insight into breeding efficient, CAB quality cattle. We tracked the progress of his pen of steers—from the first on-test weighing at Decatur County Feed Yard last December to the final processing and grading in July—hoping to give you new insight into this side of the industry.

In part II of our CAB Feedlot Gain & Carcass Contest series, we asked Schurr to evaluate his steers' performance and how he plans to use the feedlot and carcass data. Adding their personal observations are Warren Weibert, owner/manager of Decatur County Feed Yard, and John Stowell, CAB supply development director and contest coordinator.

See the final carcass data report for the Schurrtop steers in the chart on the following page.

The winners and final results were announced August 3 at a special awards reception in Denver. Held in conjunction with the National Cattlemen's Association mid-year meeting, it drew industry-wide attention. A full report will be published in next month's Angus Journal.

It's been eight months since John Schurr first inspected his pen of steers at Decatur County Feed Yard. The brisk north wind of December has been replaced by the hot southwesterly wind of August. The Kansas feedlot's main pens are no longer filled with red, white and blue ear-tagged Angus steers.

Schurr's pen of steers, along with the other 945 head entered in the Certified Angus Beef Feedlot Gain & Carcass Contest, have been fed out and shipped to the packer for processing and carcass data collection.

It's an ideal time to sit down, evaluate the steers and reflect on the contest.

Winning the top prize of \$5,000 was not foremost on this cattleman's mind before, during or after the contest. He knew the real benefits would come in education, carcass data collection and marketing.

From the start, Schurr accepted the fact that this wasn't an ideal contest for his cattle. The timing was off. By starting in December rather than November, Schurr's March calves were a little too heavy coming into the contest. His pen of steers, sired by a Schurrtop Angus bull and out of crossbred first-calf heifers, recorded an average weight of 913 pounds at the contest's 33-day starting point. A more ideal weight would have been in the 750-pound range.

After being sorted into pens by weight, the Schurrtop steers were fed for a period of six to eight months. One Schurrtop steer was shipped to the packer in May; the remaining five steers, and a majority of the contest steers, were sent in July. The wide spread in slaughter dates and the packer's decision to fatten the cattle longer, didn't help the performance of the Schurrtop pen.

**Contest coordinator** John Stowell, CAB supply development director, says the planning committee has already made plans on how to improve next year's

contest and make it more realistic to beef producers.

The first recommended revision, in response to consignor feedback, was to move the contest's starting date to November. The second revision is to put more restriction on the weight of the steers entered. The weight range will be from 500 to 850 pounds; this year, steer size stretched from 400 to 1,000 pounds. A third revision is to let a contest committee, not the packer, determine each pen's slaughter time.

Warren Weibert, owner/manager of Decatur County Feed Yard, says that marketing was the trickiest part of the contest. "We ended up feeding the cattle for a longer period, which surprised me," he says. "It was at the packer's request. But I believe it all worked out."

Also on the "how to improve" list is better communication, says Stowell. Monthly updates on the contest and the steers performance will be sent to all consignors in future contests.

No one expected a major contest like this, especially in its first year with cattle consigned from throughout the country, to be perfect. But the hard work and dedication of CAB program and Decatur County Feed Yard staff members greatly contributed to its success.

"This contest is a benchmark—a real starting point for Certified Angus Beef," says Weibert. "Angus breeders will realize the benefits in years to come."

**Schurr was very content** after seeing the final carcass data report and choosing his top five steers to represent his pen. (Consignors were allowed to have six steers per pen but only the top five were used in the final contest results.) Each steer in the Schurrtop pen graded Choice; the pen recorded an average yield grade of 2.86 and 14.6 square inch ribeye area.

Only three of the five met CAB specifications, however, which knocked

this pen out of contention for the top prize. Still, it was a better than average 60 percent CAB acceptance rate. The two steers which fell short of making CAB lacked adequate marbling; they recorded a marbling score of small 30 and small 70.

Schurr's accurate prediction of his cattle being too heavy was most evident in the final carcass weight. The pen's average carcass weight of 868 pounds was on the extreme top side of his target goal of 700 to 800 pounds.

Along with a 700-to 800-pound carcass weight, Schurr's other target goals are to produce cattle that will grade Choice, with yield grade 2 and 15-square inch ribeyes. These targets are set to meet consumer and packer demand, not just his demand as a purebred breeder.

"The main reason we entered this contest is to find cattle that will grade easier and satisfy consumer demand," Schurr says. "Pick up a newspaper and you will find that consumers are telling us they want a lean, tasty, clean beef product. We are the ones that need to change, not the consumer."

Schurr says consistently producing Choice cattle takes care of the tasty part; producing yield grade 2s takes care of the lean part; and good herd health practices and management take care of the clean part. Packers' strict regulations on product safety and cleanliness help, as well.

"The consumer also wants his or her steak to fit their plate. The packer and retailer prefer smaller carcasses. So this should tell us that we don't need a carcass size of more than 800 pounds," he adds.

Schurr believes producing yield grade 3 and 4 cattle not only hurts our product image, it's counterproductive. If the beef

industry is to become economically efficient and competitive with the poultry and pork industries, we have to clean out these fatter cattle.

"Research indicates that a steer will grade whatever he will grade at .4 inch backfat measurement," Schurr says. "Any more than that is wasting feed. The steer becomes bigger, but puts on fat on the outside, not muscle in the inside."

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*— John Schurr*

**This cattleman feels the most valuable reward of contests like this is producer education.** "The real winners will be the breeders who can make their breeding program fit the system and use this carcass data and other information to their advantage," Schurr says. "As long as our beef product meets consumer acceptance, we are all winners."

For those consignors who were disappointed in their steers performance in the contest, Schurr shares a pep talk.

"As breeders, we shouldn't quit when we don't do well. Let's learn and improve on it. Stay in there and keep trying."

As mentioned in our first story, Schurr began preparing for the CAB contest in the spring of 1990. That's when he began his selection process. A believer in performance records and the CAB carcass data program, this cattleman spent time scanning herd records and EPDs, looking at cow history and carcass data from his bull's progeny and eye-ball evaluating his 1990 calf crop.

How will Schurr use the data and information from the CAB contest? First, he will add it to his growing data base of carcass and progeny test information. This year he will gather data from a total of 200 Schurrtop cattle carcasses. Schurr is appreciative of the CAB program and the services of John Stowell. Without their help, he would not be able to gather data directly from packers.

This information is used to shape the Schurrtop breeding program and keep their target goals in sight. In addition, it helps Schurr put together a sound marketing plan.

"With this information we will be able to tell our potential bull customers what they can expect from our bulls," Schurr says. "Almost half of the bulls offered in our next sale have sires, dams or granddams with direct progeny carcass information.

"Black (Angus) are in demand because they grade Choice at a more desirable weight," he adds. "It's accepted in the industry and it's why we can stand behind our product."

**Retained ownership** is another way breeders can stand behind their product. It's an important part of feedlot and carcass contests. Just mention the subject, and a smile comes to Schurr's face, along with a quick response.

"To be qualified to sell a purebred bull, everyone should first feed their own bull's progeny," he says. "I think quite a few breeders would produce a different type of animal and market differently."

Schurr believes purebred breeders deserve more of a leadership role in the beef industry. "If you sell 100 bulls each year, the potential impact on the commercial industry is great," he says. "We have a responsibility to produce a quality product. Don't just say we're right — prove it through carcass contests."

## CAB CARCASS CONTEST REPORT

### Schurrtop Angus Ranch

| ID#      | Start | Wt. | Mat | HCW  | MB  | Grade | BF   | REA | KPH  | YG | CAB |
|----------|-------|-----|-----|------|-----|-------|------|-----|------|----|-----|
| 427B     | 940   | A   | 805 | MT0  | CH  | .44   | 14.0 | 2.0 | 2.58 | Y  |     |
| 429B     | 960   | A   | 929 | MT30 | CH  | .80   | 14.1 | 2.0 | 3.92 | Y  |     |
| 431B     | 960   | A   | 865 | SM30 | CH- | .48   | 13.1 | 1.5 | 3.10 | N  |     |
| 433B     | 835   | A   | 873 | SM70 | CH- | .52   | 16.8 | 1.5 | 2.04 | N  |     |
| 434B     | 870   | A   | 870 | MT10 | CH  | .52   | 15.1 | 2.0 | 2.67 | Y  |     |
| Pen Avg: | 913   | A   | 868 | MT   | CH  | .55   | 14.6 | 1.8 | 2.86 | —  |     |

#### CARCASS DATA GLOSSARY

Start weight: 33-day weight of steers in feedlot (lbs).  
 Mat: Maturity or age of steer at processing.  
 HCW: Hot carcass weight (lbs).  
 MB: Marbling score (MT is moderate; SM is small).  
 Grade CH means Choice.

BF: Backfat measurement.  
 REA: Ribeye area measurement.  
 KPH: Kidney, pelvic and heart measurement.  
 YG: Yield grade.  
 CAB: Met all CAB specifications.