

Got Value?

Prove it, and win big money. Here's your shot at \$200,000.

by **Steve Suther**

A third of a million dollars divided among 24 total regional and grand prizes is at stake in the first national Angus carcass challenge rewarding superior genetics.

The "Best of the Breed" Angus Challenge was unveiled Aug. 7 at the Cattle Industry Summer Conference in Denver, Colo. Corporate sponsors are Agri Beef Co., Allflex USA, Certified Angus Beef LLC (CAB), Farmland National Beef (FNB) and Merial SureHealth®.

Contest director Calvin Gunter, on leave from his position as Allflex product manager, explains that each sponsor contributes time, talent and money to the contest. Winners will be determined by the highest beef value on an FNB special contest grid. The related FNB pricing grid is one of the most attractive grids available for high-quality cattle, Gunter says.

"Cattle will be raised in a quality-controlled, process-verified system," he adds. Calf and yearling steers must be fed in either CAB-licensed feedlots or state- and contest-approved Beef Quality Assurance Program (BQAP) yards and processed at the FNB plant in Liberal, Kan.

Cattle enrollment will be tracked by state and herd of origin and placed into one of seven corresponding National Cattlemen's Beef Association (NCBA) regions, Gunter explains. The top three lots in the nation will win cash prizes of \$100,000 for first, \$50,000 for second and \$25,000 for third. Then winners from each of the seven regions will be awarded \$5,000 for first, \$2,500 for second and \$1,000 for third. In addition, Merial will double the top national award if the winning pen of cattle is SureHealth-certified.

That's serious money, but the contest — dubbed "BoB" for short — is meant to deliver as much fun as cash, says organizer Kevin Hughes, president of Agri Beef Risk Management Co., Boise, Idaho.

Contest partners

Agri Beef Co. owner and chairman Rob Rebholtz suggested the contest to Hughes earlier this year when they were discussing the 2002 Olympic Winter Games' coming to Salt Lake City, Utah, in February. With CAB an official supplier to the Games and the Agri Beef Co. feedlots CAB-licensed

from Washington to Kansas, BoB was off and running; and Hughes was interim coach.

Farmland was an easy choice as a packer partner because Agri Beef's Supreme Feeders had a longstanding relationship with FNB, a



CAB-licensed company, Hughes says. "We decided to open the contest nationwide, working through the 70 CAB-licensed feedlots and any other approved BQA yards in the country," says Art Wagner, FNB vice president.

Allflex was an obvious choice in view of the company's leadership in individual animal identification (ID) and the prospect of returning useful information through electronic ID (EID), Gunter says. When he saw the scope of the contest, Gunter agreed to accept the helm at Best of the Breed. "This contest has as much potential as any other single industry effort to improve beef quality," he says.

The team would be complete with the addition of a comprehensive health program. Merial SureHealth had a lot to bring to the table for any BQA- and process-verified enterprise, Gunter says. Designed by veterinarians and Merial to help the industry capture economic benefits by improving animal health and well-being, SureHealth certification assures everyone the cattle can quickly be adapted and placed on feed.

"Those are essential elements in producing high-value beef," notes Richard Jenkins associate director of cow-calf marketing at Merial.

On top of its regular sponsorship in Best of the Breed, SureHealth placed an enticing stack of chips. "If the winning pen in this contest is a SureHealth-certified pen, we'll double the prize," Jenkins says. "Somebody is going to win \$100,000 — we hope they win \$200,000."

Contest grid

Wagner says enrolled cattle can be sold on the Best of the Breed grid or by any other method to FNB, but contest winners are determined by placing official U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) slaughter data on a fixed-value contest grid. That ensures uniformity across time and contestants, he says. Winners will be those

having the highest figure when gross dollars from the contest grid are divided by total pounds produced in the enrolled pen.

The Best of the Breed pricing grid features a negotiated base price with variables for hot carcass yield and yield grade components derived from plant averages, Wagner notes. With a Prime premium of \$14/hundredweight (cwt.), a Certified Angus Beef® (CAB®) premium of \$5.50/cwt. and a Farmland Angus Beef® premium of \$4/cwt., the "BoB" grid stands out as one of the most rewarding quality grids in the industry.

"This is clearly a contest for Angus and Angus-cross cattle," Gunter says. Enrolled steers must meet the phenotypic specifications for CAB brand eligibility. The \$4/head entry fee must be paid prior to placement on feed in a CAB or other approved feedlot, and the minimum lot size is 80 head. "Producers may combine ownership to achieve that lot size, and there is no limit to the number of entries," Gunter adds.

All steers must be ear-tagged with individually numbered Best of the Breed EID tags manufactured by Allflex. Enrolled cattle must be scheduled for harvest at least two weeks prior to shipment to FNB and will only be accepted at the Liberal, Kan., facility on Tuesdays, Wednesdays and Thursdays, depending on data needs. A maximum of two harvest dates (one shipping sort) will be allowed, and 96% of each enrolled pen must be marketed to be eligible for cash prizes.

Gunter points out there are several benefits to producers besides the prospect of prize money. "Industry recognition can be a huge factor in the long-term value of your cattle," he says. "You get access to a superior marketing grid where the actual market pays you for high quality, and you get individual carcass data feedback in an EID system while participating in the first national carcass challenge."

"We started taking enrollments the first of September, so the first cattle are now going on feed," Gunter says. Slaughter data will be accepted until Dec. 1, 2002, and the first Best of the Breed winners will be announced at the Cattle Industry Annual Convention and Trade Show in January 2003. A continuing contest would include cattle harvested by July 1 each year, with winners announced at industry summer events.

Producers can monitor results in real time, Gunter says, by pointing Web browsers to www.bestofthebreed.com or by calling 1-866-BoB-1160 for information.

