

Beef Logic

by Bob Long



The Beef Industry in Chile

I was fortunate to receive a consulting job in Chile, South America earlier this year. It allowed my wife and I to thoroughly experience Chile, its people and their culture, its natural resources, and the beef cattle industry from conception to consumption.

The specific assignment was to recommend possible procedural improvements in live animal procurement, carcass evaluation and overall processing sanitation for a corporation that operates three beef processing plants in Chile. This company's corporate headquarters is located in Santiago, a modern city where almost half of Chile's 14 million people live, and where the bulk of the company's beef products are sold in either supermarkets or fast food and hotel restaurants. A small plant is located near Santiago but the two major operations are to the South in the small towns of Temuco and Osomo, both located in the heart of the "lake district" which produces the bulk of Chile's beef.

Chile is a long, narrow country ranging in width from only 100 to 250 miles. Its eastern border is in the Andes with some of the world's highest peaks and the western boundary is 2,650 miles of Pacific Coast. The Northern one-third is desert with mining the major industry. The central one-third is an agricultural area primarily involved in fruit production including an exceptional wine industry. The southern one-third is devoted to forestry, dairy and beef cattle and sheep. Geographically, this region is the same distance from the equator as our cornbelt. However, the growing season is shorter, the summers cooler and the winters warmer giving this area a climate much like our Pacific Northwest.

Beef production is greatly influenced by the dairy industry. Recent years have seen high milk prices and many farms formerly devoted to beef cattle have converted to dairy herds. Approximately 60 percent of the dairy cows are mated with Holstein bulls for replacement females and the balance to Angus and Hereford bulls. Therefore, a

large portion of the cattle going to slaughter are straight Holstein or half bloods.

Also represented in Chile's beef population is the Red & White Friesian—a dual purpose breed originating in Europe. These cattle are medium framed, heavily muscled and appeared to be performing well under range conditions. Several carcasses were evaluated, all of which were excellent in cutability with some showing 2 square inch of ribeye per hundredweight (cwt.) of carcass.

The Angus and Hereford breeds are also well represented with several good seedstock herds and large commercial operations using both straight bred and crossbred herds. A few herds have used the Continental breeds sparingly but cattle with Brahman/Zebu influence are nonexistent.

An impressive beef operation (and one of the best I have seen anywhere) is owned and managed by Ricardo Hevia near Osomo. The home ranch is devoted to an Angus seedstock herd of 400 head of outstanding brood cows.

It was surprising and pleasing to hear this herd was largely built on daughters of Ankonian Dynamo and Band 116 of Ideal 2118 7174. The current calf crop included a set of calves by Century Touchstone 131 that were most impressive. These calves were uniformly strong, correct and heavily muscled.

Complete performance records are maintained and Senior Hevia is quite knowledgeable. He believes firmly in performance selection and expected progeny differences (EPDs) and has used semen from the top bulls wherever he found them. Heavily muscled cattle are to his liking and he believes in line breeding to the best ones. He has traveled widely in this country, Canada and Argentina and is well acquainted in Angus circles.

Equally impressive was Senior Hevia's extensive commercial operations in the foothills of the Andes. This beautiful country has good rainfall and lush, high

quality pastures that support excellent weaning weights. The cow herd was about three-fourths Angus with the remaining one-fourth either Simmental or Limousin and they were being mated with Angus bulls from the registered herd. None of the bull calves are castrated. At 9 or 10 months of age the heavy end (800 pounds plus) go directly to slaughter. The remaining bulls and the heifers not needed for replacements are given a short feed (70 to 80 days) and then slaughtered. This is a progressive and efficient program that could be used to advantage wherever pastures are adequate to support it.

The production phase of the beef industry in Chile varies from the progressive one above to the primitive with a portion of the beef coming from worn out oxen. Some beef must be imported from Argentina and Uruguay so there is little concern about export markets.

The processing phase of the business is equally variable, ranging from local butcher shops without refrigeration to the latest in value-added products such as hamburger patties and restructured steaks produced by the latest mechanical equipment and under excellent sanitary conditions.

The Chilean government's carcass grading system is badly in need of revision. The grade is determined primarily by age as indicated by the teeth. This results in widely different kinds of carcasses receiving the same grade.

The USDA hears occasional complaints about its meat inspection and grading programs but American cattle producers should be grateful. As you travel the world, you'll like home best.

