

STEERING IN THE RIGHT DIRECTION

The steer futurity is a growing trend in the beef industry. Retained ownership profits, progeny testing, and carcass data collection are just a few of its benefits.

BY JERILYN JOHNSON

Move over packers and feedlot contractors. More and more modern beef producers are practicing their own form of vertical integration. These producers are cutting out the middleman and getting a taste of added profits. They are retaining ownership of their cattle through the backgrounding and feeding stage — all the way to the packer.

“Cow-calf operators have no way of knowing the quality of meat they are selling if they sell calves right off the cow,” says Jim Church, University of Idaho Extension ag agent. “With a retained ownership program, they’re able to determine if the bulls they are using or the breeding program they are following is producing the kind of beef product the consumer wants and the kind of beef product that will make them money.”

Steer futurities are one vehicle Angus producers — both commercial and purebred — are using to get into a retained ownership program.

These futurities, also known as feedouts, feeding trials or carcass contests, can provide producers with important economical and educational information on their beef production practices. A renewed interest and curiosity of feeding out cattle have sparked universities, cattlemen associations, feedlot owners and agribusiness companies around the country to sponsor some form of steer futurity to help educate beef producers.

Fururities offer extra incentives, such as cash prizes and publicity, to draw producers. The side benefit of direct contact with feedlots and packers also makes them worthwhile.

Even the American Angus Association has jumped on the bandwagon. December 12 marks the kickoff of the Certified Angus Beef Feedlot Gain-Carcass Contest.

This national contest is being held to encourage cow-calf producers to focus on the importance of carcass quality and feed efficiency. It will allow them to gather valuable data for their breeding and

production programs. The American Angus Association is the only breed organization to have an on-going sire evaluation for carcass performance of progeny. In addition, a CAB carcass data program has been established. Now we will have an added tool — the CAB Feedlot Gain-Carcass Contest — to help Angus producers keep on track.



THE ADVANTAGES of entering the CAB contest or any other futurity are numerous. Here are the most important ones:

- Evaluation of the potential of retained ownership of calves until slaughter.
- Experience of feeding calves to slaughter weight.
- Better understanding of the cattle feeding business.
- Comparative data on average daily gain and carcass traits.
- Allows seedstock producers to evaluate the progeny of their bulls.

- Once this information is gathered and evaluated, it can be determined whether or not improvements are needed in breeding and/or production programs.
- Opportunity to spread out marketing of your cattle.

On the negative side, producers who use a retained ownership program or enter steer futurities take on risks ordinarily assumed by feedlot owners. There is risk of cattle illness or worse yet, mortality. There’s also risk that interest rates or feed costs will rise and cattle prices will fall.

Consigning a pen of steers to a futurity is a major investment in time and money. Along with the entry fee, there is transportation, feed costs, feedlot charges and interest, and marketing fees. Seedstock producers may have to sacrifice a few bull prospects, as well, to feed out a representative group of cattle.

For most producers, however, the benefits outweigh the sacrifices. Bob Harriman, manager of Grayling Angus Farm, Villa Ridge, Mo., had the opportunity to test a bull’s progeny performance in the feedlot and on the rail during the 1988 Missouri Steer Futurity.

One of Harriman’s best customers, Keith Schnarre, a commercial cattleman from Centralia, Mo., entered a pen of five steers sired by a Grayling Farm embryo transfer bull. He was sired by Pine Drive Big Sky and out of a Progression cow.

Schnarre’s steers went on to win champion Angus pen and second place overall breeds in the contest. They placed second in retail carcass value and third in feedlot profit.

“We had been trying to breed for high quality carcass bulls for years,” Harriman says. “Seeing the rate of gain and carcass data from this bull’s progeny really helped push our program further along.”

BEEF INDUSTRY EXPERTS are telling us we're headed toward a value-based marketing system. This means that carcasses will be bought and sold on the true value of the carcass, not on average values. The goal of the 90s is to produce a carcass with minimum amount of external fat, yet a relatively high degree of marbling or internal fat.

Angus producers who know how their cattle perform and can accurately identify sires which can consistently produce quality carcass cattle will be ready for that day. Those innovative producers who have taken the opportunity to test calves in steer futurities or other retained ownership programs are sure to be first in line to receive a paycheck.

CAB FEEDLOT GAIN & CARCASS CONTEST

LOCATION: Decatur County Feed Yard, Oberlin, Kan.

SPONSOR: Certified Angus Beef program
CONTACT: John Stowell, CAB supply development director, 60094 Vivian Street, Arvada, CO 80004; (303) 420-0936

Approximately 1,000 Angus-sired steers were expected to be entered in the CAB Feedlot Gain-Carcass Contest by the November 1 entry deadline. Added incentives, such as a \$5,000 grand prize, special awards, state association sponsored cattle delivery and breeder sponsored entry fee payments, have given this new contest a big boost.

Any cattle producer may enter the contest as long as his pen of steers is sired by registered Angus bulls. An entry consists of five or six steers, but only the best five will be evaluated for the contest. They must be born between Dec. 1, 1989 and May 1, 1990. Birthdates must be provided on the entry form. Cattle must also meet the visual requirements for the Certified Angus Beef program — predominantly black hided (black baldies are acceptable), no visible Brahman influence (hump or floppy ears) and be typical beef type (no dairy).

A \$100 entry fee per pen will be charged. One-fourth of that will be set aside to be used as CAB carcass premiums.

Cattle will be delivered to Decatur County Feed Yard the week of December 12 for processing. After processing, cattle will go on a 30-day to 60-day starter ration. Steers will then have their official weights taken and begin a minimum of 100 days on a finishing ration.

Backfat measurements will be taken at the end of the feeding period. Steers

will be required to have between .3 and .4 inch backfat. All cattle will be slaughtered at Hyplains Dressed Beef in Dodge City, Kan. on the date(s) specified by the contest committee.

Carcass data will be gathered and tabulated there. All carcass data and contest results will be available to producers.

Pricing will be based on a practical average, top of the market quote by USDA for southwestern Kansas a week prior to kill. This is provided that cattle meet practical yield and grade requirements. Premiums will be paid for carcasses meeting CAB specifications.

The contest winds up with an awards program and seminar on Certified Angus Beef. The seminar will cover the CAB program and how it relates to value-based marketing. Its time and location will be announced at a later date.

HERE'S A SAMPLING of steer futurities and carcass contests from around the country:

GREAT WESTERN BEEF EXPO

LOCATION: Eastern Colorado Research Center Feedlot, Akron.

SPONSOR: Great Western Beef Expo & Colorado State Extension.

CONTACT: Sherman Mauck, Expo general manager, P.O. Box 127, Sterling, CO 80751; (303) 522-3200

The 22nd annual beef sire progeny testing program will start this December. This is the oldest and most competitive program in the country. Steers from eight states and at least 12 different breeds are entered in the 1990-91 Expo.

After four weeks on a maintenance ration to be acclimated and recover from any shipping stress, the steers will be weighed and then begin the actual 154-day feed test. Four additional official weighings are scheduled throughout the feeding period.

Steers will be evaluated for feedlot performance, including average daily carcass gain, adjusted feed efficiency, carcass price per pound, and progeny performance. Results will be computed by carcass comparison only.

A live animal field day is scheduled next June. When ready to slaughter, steers will be sent to the EXCEL packing plant in Sterling, Colo. All carcasses will be on display in EXCEL's coolers. Area ranchers, 4-H and FFA members, and college livestock judging teams are invited to the field day and carcass display. The annual awards program, followed by the Ex-

po's annual meeting, will follow the carcass display.

ILLINOIS BEEF CARCASS CONTEST

LOCATION: Pierson Feedlot, Topeka, Ill.

SPONSOR: Illinois Beef Association and Fulton County Cattlemen

CONTACTS: Bill Eaton, chairman, IBA cow-calf council, Huntsville, Ill. 62344; (217) 392-2582

A ski vacation at the Vail/Beaver Creek Resort in Colorado awaits the owner of the champion pair of steers in the 1990 contest. Other prizes include approximately \$1,500 in jackpot awards. In addition, the Illinois Angus Association will sponsor a Certified Angus Beef division. To win, steers must meet CAB requirements and be registered. They will have an opportunity to win an extra \$500.

Any Illinois producer is eligible to enter. Entries and a \$20 to \$30 per head entry fee were due Nov. 1. Cattle will be delivered Nov. 16-17 to the Pierson feedlot. Cattle and carcasses will be ranked according to the Illinois State Fair Premier Carcass system.

MISSOURI STEER FUTURITY

LOCATION: Manken's Feedlot, Salisbury, Mo.

SPONSOR: Missouri Cattlemen's Association and University of Missouri Extension.
CONTACT: Jack Whittier, Extension cow-calf specialist, University of Missouri, Columbia, MO 65211; (314) 882-7327

Approximately 90 head are entered in the 1990-91 futurity. That's an increase of 40 head over last year. Steers were delivered to the feedlot this month. Some cattle were also involved in a pre-conditioning trial sponsored by Purina and Brush Creek Veterinary Clinic, Columbia, Mo.

Upon delivery, steers are processed with routine receiving vaccinations, dewormed, implanted and weighed as a pen of five steers. The steers are held off feed for a day, then reweighed. This overnight shrink weight is used in all calculations.

At the time of delivery, cattle are appraised for current market value by a local cattle buyer. His assessment is based on quality, breed type, weight and fleshiness.

All steers are fed in one group in a common pen at the feedlot. They are fed a high roughage ration for a short time, then brought up to a high concentrate ration for the remainder of the feeding period. Feed costs are calculated from allocation of feed based on the net energy system.

Steers are slaughtered when it appears that three of five steers in any one

pen will grade Choice. Slaughter dates are based on weight, frame, estimated backfat and a visual assessment by consignors, feedlot personnel, University Extension and packer buyers.

Carcass data is collected and summarized in a report for producers.

WESTERN MISSOURI

STEER FEEDOUT

LOCATION: GM Feedlot, Appleton City.

SPONSOR: Missouri Extension Service

CONTACT: Eldon Cole, Extension livestock specialist, Extension Office, Courthouse, Mt. Vernon, MO; (417) 466-3102

The 1989-90 feedout proved to be profitable for consignors. The average profit, above feeding and marketing costs and the initial value of the steers, was \$317 per pen of five steers, or \$63 per head.

The top daily gain was earned by a pen of black baldies consigned by Pearson Land & Cattle Company, Rich Hill. They gained 3.19 pounds per day. Earning second place rate of gain was a pen of Angus-sired calves by Eugene and Ylene Williams, Verona. Their calves gained 3.19 pounds per day.

With the Angus breed dominating entries in this feedout, nearly 70 percent of the steers graded Choice. Discounts were down to \$7.66 on the average.

The 1990-91 feedout is already underway. Steers entered in this year's feedout will be delivered to GM Feedlot on Nov. 13. A \$25 entry fee is applied against the feedyard charges when the test begins.

A slide show reviewing the feedout and showing many of the steers and carcasses is featured at the feedout awards banquet in June. Complete carcass data is provided to the owners.

WBCIA FEEDLOT TEST & CARCASS EVALUATION

SPONSOR: Wyoming Beef Cattle Improvement Association (WBCIA)

CONTACT: Doug Hixon, Extension beef specialist, University of Wyoming, Box 3354, University Station, Laramie, WY 82071; (307) 766-3100

The WBCIA started its 7th annual test this fall. It provides producers the opportunity to consign a minimum of five head of steers (or heifers if a total of at least 50 head are consigned) to a commercial feedlot and retain ownership through the packer stage.

Cattle are group fed. Feed costs are allocated based on metabolizable energy requirements for the measured rates of gain for the particular frame size of cattle.

Marketing options are left open. Consignors can sell cattle by whatever method

they feel will make the most money.

ADG data is obtained periodically throughout the feeding. Carcass data is obtained when the cattle are sold.

The unique aspect of this program is that it is a test not a contest. The owner is initially identified by a number that only he or she knows. The reason for this approach is that organizers feel that producers have different objectives for being involved in the test. Progeny test groups are encouraged.

IDAHO FEEDLOT & CARCASS

PERFORMANCE STEER FUTURITY

SPONSOR: Idaho Extension Service

LOCATION: L&M Feedlot, Pasco, Idaho

CONTACTS: Jim Church, Extension agent; Grangeville, ID, (208) 983-2667; DeVon Knutson, Extension livestock agent; Washington State University, Walla Walla.

Started in 1988, this futurity offers western Idaho and eastern Washington beef producers evaluative information on their steers. Consignors receive ADG figures twice during the seven-month test. They also receive carcass quality information such as dressing percentage, fat content, rib eye area and marbling.

This futurity has grown each year in entries and participants. Consignors made some nice profits the first year — averaging \$136.48 per steer. This was attributed to a mild winter, low feed costs and high cattle prices.

Last year, 87 steers were entered by 15 producers. Average profits were \$25 per head due to a tough winter and high feed costs.

NEW MEXICO BEET FINISHING/ CARCASS EVALUATION PROJECT

SPONSOR: New Mexico State University (NMSU) Extension Service

LOCATION: Bradley 3 Ranch, Memphis, Texas.

CONTACT: NMSU Extension Service; (505) 646-1709.

This project is an educational program that provides New Mexico cattle producers with a method of evaluating their cattle for feedlot performance and carcass quality. Special emphasis is placed on carcass quality.

Plans are underway for the second annual project to start with delivery of cattle to the Bradley Ranch in early December. The cattle will be put on feed this winter and marketed next spring and summer. The Bradley 3 Ranch operates its own feedlot, slaughter house and marketing system. This helps solve the logistics problems associated with getting cattle to a slaughter plant and collecting carcass

data for both Extension personnel and producers.

OK STEER FEEDOUT

SPONSOR: Oklahoma State University

CONTACT: Wayne Shearhart, Extension agent, Courthouse, Chandler, OK 74834; (405) 258-0560

GOALS: ADG, carcass quality and profitability.

Consignors may enter one or more lots of five steers born after Jan. 1, 1990. Calves should be weighed prior to delivery and must be preconditioned at least three weeks, bunk broke, dehorned or tipped, vaccinated and dewormed. Entry fee of \$25 per lot must accompany each nomination.

Steers are delivered in early November. They are fed for a 21-day warm-up period, then fed another 182 days. Feed cost will be determined using the net energy system based on average weight and gain of steers.

Steer groups are marketed when it's estimated that three out of five head will grade low Choice. All five head will be sold at one time. Steers are sold on grade and yield basis. There's a discount for carcasses over 900 pounds or under 550 pounds.

Awards are given for high profit pen, high ADG pen, best carcass pen, high profit steer, high ADG steer and best carcass steer. A meeting is held at the feedout's conclusion with a discussion of each lot. Slides of each steer at the beginning and end of test are also shown. All test data and results are available.

HIGH PLAINS 4-H COMMERCIAL CATTLE

FEEDING PROJECT

SPONSOR: Kansas State University Extension Service

CONTACT: Northwest Research Extension Center, RR 2, Box 830, Colby, KS 67701; (913) 462-3971

Developed four years ago for youngsters enrolled in a 4-H beef project, this real-world approach gives 4-H'ers the opportunity to learn more about cattle performance from weaning to slaughter. It also helps them become familiar with carcass traits and consumer demand.

Through carcass data collection on steers, they are able to relate visual, live animal characteristics with carcass characteristics. The economic importance of rate of gain and carcass quality is also emphasized. This helps them understand the importance of identifying superior lines of breeding for these traits and will make them more efficient cattle producers in the future.

HIGH PLAINS

STEER FUTURITY

SPONSOR: Kansas State University/Extension Service

Provides producers opportunity to evaluate cattle for postweaning rate of gain and carcass desirability with emphasis on progeny testing, make breed comparisons and retained ownership options.

Winners are determined using an index system that places importance on four categories: quality grade, yield grade, hot carcass weight and live animal performance.

WESTERN BONANZA

STEER FUTURITY

LOCATION: Beef Evaluation Center

SPONSOR: Cal Poly State University

CONTACT: Mike Bell, Animal Science Department, Cal Poly State University, San Luis Obispo, CA 93407; (805) 756-2685

GOAL: Educate producers and animal science students on identifying breeding programs and sires that are producing calves of superior genetic potential for rate of gain, feed efficiency and carcass desirability.

Producers may consign a lot of five steers. They may enter one or more lots. The futurity committee reserves the right to limit entries based on available space and water supply. (Limit is 100 head). The best four steers (based on ADG) in each pen is used in calculating awards.

Steers must be born between Aug. 1 and Oct. 31, 1990, with an average weight of at least 500 pounds on delivery date. All entries must be nominated by May 15, 1991 with a \$25 per lot fee accompanying entry. Steers are to be delivered to Cal Poly in early June, 1991. Calves should be castrated, dehorned, vaccinated and weaned at least two weeks prior to delivery.

After a 21-day warm-up period, cattle are weighed, measured for hip height and administered Ivomec. Hip height is used to help determine which lots are fed together and provides a final weight range basis for shipping.

Cattle will be slaughtered when the entire lot is believed to exhibit sufficient finish and low Choice grade. Economy of gain also influences shipping date.

Feed, yardage and veterinary costs will be billed monthly. All cattle will be sold on a carcass basis. All final test data and results are available.

