

Commercial Feedlots Have the COMPETITIVE EDGE



Feeding cattle for more than 23 years, John Hatton has worked toward improved efficiency in cattle feeding—

efficiency of labor and cattle through management, so not to waste time or feed.

“When you lose efficiency no one gets that money, it’s just lost,” says Hatton, general manager of Sunbelt Feeders, Hugoton, Kan. Before managing Sunbelt he worked at Supreme Feeders, Liberal, Kan., for 17 years.

Retaining ownership is an important strategy to consider. He encourages producers to use it as a marketing option. Check prices at the sale barn and with order buyers and run breakevens to see which marketing method is most efficient for you.

“Eight out of 10 years you’ll make money at retaining ownership; Hatton says.

Hatton says it’s important to wean at home and then turn calves on a meadow or sudan grass to precondition. If you don’t have the facilities available,

several custom feedlots have the capabilities to do so, or they can suggest a backgrounder near their lot for you to use.

Extra steps to insure the health of your calves will make a difference in feedlot performance. Hatton suggests using a structured vaccination program. An ideal program would be to give one shot prior to weaning, a booster at weaning and then 35 to 40 days after placed in the lot giving another shot.

“Vaccines are not that expensive,” Hatton says. “A vaccination regime like that wouldn’t cost \$2 per head.”

He suggests waiting to implant and worm your calves. Allowing the feedlot to do it their way will let them do a better job with your cattle.

Hatton would like to see calves placed at 600 pounds, weaned and preconditioned, convert at 5.5 pounds of dry matter to 1 pound of gain, have average daily gains (ADG) of 2.2 pounds per day, grade 80 percent Choice or better, and yield 63.75 percent or better.

“If they’re not at those levels they are not in the upper end and are not what we need to be producing,” he says.

In the feeding industry there are several traits of economic importance. Hatton says feed conversion is the bottomline. It is what you did with what you had to deal with. No. 2 is carcass merit. If a producer can receive a premium it’s because of this trait.

Hatton admits individual producers have been successful feeding their own cattle, but adds the commercial industry does have an advantage.

Commercial lots can offer

cattle expertise, a competitive edge and an established reputation with the packers. Compared to an individual who may sell two or three loads a year, a commercial lot markets 200 to 300 lots.

“The beef industry needs to develop a consistent target to aim at, and we have to be able to pay a producer for producing that product?”

Hatton believes the beef industry has a strong future but things are going to change. Producers are going to have to work towards making their product more predictable. In the future, 600-pound calves right off their mothers will go right into the feedlot as the industry moves toward a more stereotype product like the pork and chicken industry.



John Hatton, Hugoton, Kan., says producers need to steadily work towards a top quality consistent and palatable product

