



Steer Feedouts Serve as Producers' First Step to Beef Improvement



If you're on a mission to collect progeny and carcass data, but don't have the numbers to put together a potload of steers, or aren't willing to take on the economic risk of a full retained ownership program, don't despair. Many producers have discovered that a steer feedout program is the next best thing.

Steer feedouts have provided many cow-calf producers — large and small — the opportunity to gain end product knowledge and retained ownership experience. Most feedouts request only small group consignments from producers, resulting in a low financial risk.

At least 48 state-sponsored feedouts are conducted across the United States today (see listing on next page). Consignors to these programs represent most cow-calf systems that are prevalent in the beef industry. Most feedouts or feedlot projects are coordinated by state Extension and beef association personnel, with education being

the No. 1 priority and goal.

In their quest for end product knowledge and beef improvement, many Angus breeders have consigned pens of steers to state feedout programs. Others have taken the opportunity to consign pens of steers to the *Certified Angus Beef™* Value Discovery Program, an educational feedlot test started in Kansas back in 1991 which is sponsored by the Certified Angus Beef Program. See page 89 in the CAB Program section of this issue for the latest information.

Feedouts allow beef producers who have never explored retained ownership to:

1. Gain experience in the cattle feeding phase;
2. Understand the importance of various carcass traits;
3. Experience value-based marketing; and
4. Explore how cattle resulting from their breeding and management program perform in such a system.

A steer feedout research project assigned to beef

researchers at the University of Missouri-Columbia (UMC) and University of Kentucky (UK) in 1995 by the Beef Improvement Federation may uncover even more useful information for the beef industry down the road.

"While each feedout program provides a wealth of information for its participants, the BIF Central Test & Growth Committee felt there may be unrecognized benefits of reviewing the feedout data collectively," says William Herring, UMC Extension beef geneticist. "Feedyard and carcass performance could be described for many of these systems if we were equipped with background information about those cow-calf systems represented in the data."

Herring and Kentucky beef scientist Darrah Bullock are in the process of compiling and analyzing thousands of carcass and performance records from steer feedouts.

One roadblock they have experienced is getting the information to a central collection point. Cooperation

(left) Feedouts allow producers to gain experience in the cattle feeding phase.

between feedout managers and universities, however, is clearing the path. Additional management information on the producers who consign cattle to feedouts is also needed to provide system analyses.

Perhaps the biggest challenge for the researchers is creating a standardized form which is necessary in order to enhance uniform data collection.

"With potentially thousands of observations represented over time for most sire breeds, feedyard and carcass trends could be evaluated for each of those breeds," the researchers say. "To maximize usefulness, this would require many records collected in a standardized format."

In an effort to facilitate a national database, steer feedout records from Iowa, Missouri, Nebraska and North Dakota were compiled this past year. Before edits, there were 4,544 steer records representing 30 sire breeds. Numerous traits were represented, but the ones most common across states were feedlot average daily gain, hot carcass weight, ribeye area, fat thickness, USDA quality grade, and USDA yield grade.

Information harvested from a national steer feedout database will, no doubt, have huge benefits to the beef industry, BIF and these researchers are taking the appropriate steps to ensure the data is uniform from the feedouts and data analysis is meaningful.

"As this database expands other useful analyses can be performed," Herring says. "More extensive and similar information must be recorded by feedouts that participate in this effort. The greatest use of these data in the future may be the identification of profitable beef production systems which produce a consistent, high quality end product."

— Jerilyn Johnson