

## CATTLE BUYERS WEEKLY

MARKETING AND BUSINESS NEWS FOR THE BEEF INDUSTRY

October 9, 1989

### ENGLISH BREEDS IN MOST DEMAND

ENGLISH breeds, specifically Angus, are most popular among the nation's top packer buyers. Both packers and meat scientists see black cattle as forming the industry's future genetic base. But many in the industry perceive that high percentage Choice cattle that are externally lean are a genetic impossibility.

These points emerge from a major study of attitudes and opinions of the U.S. beef industry carried out this summer by an independent research company, Nielsen Research Group. Nielsen interviewed cattle feeders, packer buyers and beef scientists. The study, believed to be the first of its kind, contains some fascinating conclusions. They include:

- \* English breeds are perceived as the saviors of the industry in lessening the dilemma of lean versus Choice. Exotic breeds, specifically Simmental and Brahman in particular, are viewed with skepticism and distrust.
- \* The current pricing system is inadequate, archaic, favors the packer and is highly subjective. Most players would like to have the system overhauled. Yet cattle feeders are a stumbling block to changing the system. Since many are paid for their services by days on feed, they have no incentive to improve overall beef quality.
- \* Communication is seen as a major challenge by all three segments interviewed. All voiced annoyance at the lack of communication with each other and with consumers. One in four feedlots indicated that better relations with packers was a top objective.
- \* Beef's image as an expensive protein source is detrimental in competing against other sources which are perceived as less costly, more convenient and lower in calorie count.
- \* A high degree of misinformation concerning the use of chemicals in beef production exists outside the industry. The industry perceives implants as favorably affecting the industry. But public perception of hormones as an unsafe additive is considered detrimental to the image of beef. Use of Finaplix is of greatest concern currently, says the study.

### Exotics Lose Popularity

The pinpointing of breeds came through strongly in comments from both packers and scientists, says the firm's Roger Nielsen. Many indicated a strong return to dependency on British breeds and a drop in popularity of the Exotic breeds. Packers seek black cattle because they perceive them as having a lean carcass that grades Choice. Exotic breeds are reputed to have problems in tenderness and texture and seldom grade Choice because of lack of inside fat, he says.

Nielsen carried out the three-part study in July and August. It surveyed 243 feedlot owners or managers, 85% of whom feed more than 10,000 cattle per year. It also questioned 23 head cattle buyers at all major Midwest and Plains plants. The average buyer bought 1,163,550 cattle last year. Buyers represented 10 states. Nielsen also interviewed 39 beef production specialists, meat scientists and extension beef specialists from top universities and state experimental stations. The 39 were interviewed in four focus groups at the annual meeting of the American Society of Animal Scientists in Lexington, Ky. We report on other aspects of the survey on page 2.

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The results of the study put Angus in a dominant position for the future. We all need to do our best to see that Angus do indeed become the "saviors of the (beef) industry".

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