

Aim for Premiums



PHOTOS BY KASEY BROWN

CAB Beef Cattle Specialist Paul Dykstra gives tips to reach CAB target through Q&A.

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For Angus breeders, the *Certified Angus Beef*® (CAB®) brand gives a great

marketing advantage and goal to shoot for in producing a high-quality end product. What goes into the cattle selection and management to reach that elite goal? Whether you are selecting a steer for a carcass contest like that at the National Junior Angus Show or wanting to increase the premiums on your feeder calves,

Certified Angus Beef LLC (CAB) Beef Cattle Specialist Paul Dykstra gives some insight.

What do you look for in the initial animal — EPDs, type, genetic history, etc.?

In choosing an Angus steer for a high-quality carcass end point, the genetic package is keenly important. The *CAB Best Practices Manual* (which can be found at www.cabpartners.com/bpm/) for those

targeting the *Certified Angus Beef* brand advocates using sires in the top 40th

percentile of the breed for marbling expected progeny difference (EPD). Of course, when it comes to carcass grading, there is virtually no upper limit to how much marbling is desirable. Therefore, selecting sires (and dams) with even higher marbling EPDs will increase the progeny's chances of a CAB carcass outcome.

The ideal finished steer should stay relatively lean in terms of external fat to a weight near 1,400-1,500 pounds (lb.) at the top end. Upward selection pressure on EPDs for carcass weight and/or yearling weight can provide for efficient growth during the feeding period to an ideal carcass weight in the range of 850 to 950 lb. and optimum backfat thickness at 0.5 to 0.6 inches. Cattle that yield high-value, heavy carcasses on the least feed per pound of gain will be the most profitable.

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If we're selecting replacement females from the same calf crop, we may temper the criteria for size and growth a bit.

Ribeye area and red meat yield are also important. With this in mind, we can use EPDs to select for a larger ribeye size that will increase the muscle-to-fat ratio, increasing dressing percentage and keeping yield grade in check. Visual evaluation is still important for both musculature and structural soundness. The latter item is especially important in the feedlot to ensure animals can remain agile and feeling good as they reach heavier weights.

How much do you feed a steer per day to reach market weight? What weight should be targeted?

A rule of thumb to keep in mind is that a steer will eat about 2.5% to 3% of its body weight in feed. However, as the animal grows it can be hard to keep track of its weight change without ready access to a scale. In general, when finishing a steer, we want to feed as much as it will eat of a properly balanced ration that is high in energy.

If a steer leaves a few scraps of feed or just cleans it up by the time the next feeding session rolls around, then we're stimulating optimum feed consumption. That's what we want, to maximize both daily weight gain and marbling deposition in the muscle from nutrition. If the pace of weight gain seems too rapid for the desired final weight on a set harvest date, regulating the amount of feed fed per day is permissible. Bear in mind that limiting gain and performance too much will be negative to marbling deposition.

What should you feed?

Feed selection in a feedlot setting need not be fancy or challenging. The primary concerns are that the ration be properly balanced for all the essential nutrients within the proper mix of roughage and grain or

grain substitutes. Typically, that means a corn-based ration that includes some kind of roughage, such as hay and corn silage. Distillers' grains are commonly fed as a protein, energy and fat component and displacing a portion of the higher percentages of corn that used to be fed in all conventional rations. A supplement providing some combination of protein, vitamins and minerals may be considered to round out the ration, dependent on the other ingredients.

What can influence a steer's performance?

Genetics are the first limitation of a steer's performance. If rapid weight gain, muscle growth and marbling are the goal, which they typically are, then we need to understand the genetic differences for these traits that exist between animals. Disposition is also

important, as data suggest nervous or flighty cattle tend to gain less and spend less time at the feedbunk.

All other impacts on growth performance are environmental, such as weather, health, feedstuffs, feed delivery, and whether or not growth promotants or ionophores are used. Do some research and planning prior to starting a steer on feed in order to get the details right. We must properly "step up" a weaned calf or yearling straight off of pasture to the higher-energy feedlot diet. Failing to make the transition slowly over three weeks or more will result in poor gut health or acidosis. Once the full transition is made to a high-energy diet, then we can shoot for full feed intake.

Cattlemen wanting to increase their cattle's CAB acceptance rates can find more resources at www.cabpartners.com.



Feeder steer project tips

For juniors working on a feeder steer project, Paul Dykstra, beef cattle specialist for Certified Angus Beef LLC (CAB), has some specific tips.

What are some of the major differences in feeding an individual steer and feeding steers in a feedlot scenario?

The first obvious difference is the type of feeds available. A junior exhibitor may not have access to bulk feeds like corn silage or distillers' grains that are typically more economical as they're purchased in bulk volumes. That's something to be aware of, but it need not discourage anyone from moving forward.

Many feed companies have bagged feeds that are very effective, although more expensive, for a smaller-scale project. It is often cost-effective to use a mixture of both bagged feed and bulk feed, like hay or corn together if the situation allows it.

The second difference in feeding a single steer is the potential lack of competition at the bunk from a penmate. Cattle will eat best and thrive when penned with a buddy. That's not to say there should be an actual shortage of feed for which animals must compete. Rather, it is a behavioral trait of cattle that when there is more than one mouth to feed, all of them go to feed and consume more readily because they perceive that they may not get their share. That's why it is highly preferred to feed more than one steer in the same pen, even if they are fed in separate feed pans or troughs.

What are some of the lessons a junior can learn from feeding a carcass steer?

A junior exhibitor can learn a lot about commercial beef production from feeding a carcass steer. The feeding process may, at times, closely resemble a breeding heifer project, but there is the added learning opportunity at harvest when the carcass and feeding results are measured.

The carcass side of the equation is one that is so often misunderstood by producers because it's not something they have to be an expert in to operate their business. I think kids benefit greatly if they learn at an early age what the value differences are in finished cattle and what specific carcass traits drive those values either higher or lower. If a youth goes on to be involved in beef production as an adult, they'll benefit greatly by knowing the facts about carcass value and what the packers and end users are desiring.

