Million Milestone

A million lessons from CAB feedlot partners.

by Steve Suther

In a million minutes, you will be almost two years older. A million-car traffic jam would reach from New York to L.A. and back again.

A million is a lot of anything — dollars, miles or years. It's also a lot of data, and the most recent milestone for Certified Angus Beef LLC (CAB) Supply Development. The CAB Feedlot-Licensing Program (FLP) passed the 1 million mark this year in its carcass database that began with the first pen of steers in May 1999.

"The program began modestly and increased steadily, thanks to the diligence of our network of licensed feedlots in 14 states," says Gary Fike, CAB feedlot specialist based in Manhattan, Kan. "They enrolled and took action to help capture data on a million cattle."

Credit goes to the data collectors, packers and processors as well, Fike says, in maintaining the link to CAB staff in Ohio and Kansas offices. "The first year, the database consisted of 'detailed rows' on just over 6,000 head of cattle," he says. "That jumped to 62,986 by 2000; 142,523 head the next year, and up to a peak of 206,976 head last year. The cumulative total exceeded a million head this summer."

This isn't a pointless exercise or a race to capture a million detailed rows of data, Fike notes. "We return the information to the producer or feedlot that owned the cattle. They benefit in different ways, depending on their role," he says.

"Cow-calf producers can use the data to make genetic changes that improve performance, carcass characteristics and profitability," Fike says. "Feedlots that buy cattle may choose to purchase the same ones next year or avoid them, depending on what the information shows."

There's another, "big picture" value to the data. "Through enrollment, CAB feedlots note in-weights, implant use, days on feed, state of origin, weaned status and genetics," Fike explains. "As cattle are shipped to the packer, the feedlots provide closeout information on feed efficiency and the rate and cost of gain."

Tie all that together with a million rows of detailed carcass data and it's a valuable resource. Analysis can show performance differences between the high-quality cattle that hit the *Certified Angus Beef*® (CAB®) brand target and those that fail.

"We have found that the number and kind of implants, and whether cattle are solely Angus-sired, affects how cattle perform and grade," Fike says. "Where fat thickness, ribeye area and marbling scores are tied to each carcass, we can correlate differences in CAB acceptance rate with other carcass and performance traits. We learn what is working and what isn't.

"There's a lot of data in this bank, and it can help the Angus breed improve over time," he adds. "A million is a lot, but it won't stop there because our licensed partners help us add to it every working day."

Percentages of a million

With steer pens 57% of the mix; heifers, 35% and mixed pens, 8%, the million carcasses in Certified Angus Beef LLC's (CAB's) database averaged 159 days on feed; final weight, 1,232 lb.; dressing percentage, 63.48%; hot carcass weight, 782 pounds. And 1.9% graded USDA Prime, 58.0% graded Choice, 36.3% graded Select and nearly 4% graded Standard or had no quality grade assigned. The yield grade (YG) distribution was 6.6% YG 1; 35.4% YG 2; 47.3% YG 3; 8.8% YG 4 and 0.9% YG 5.

Cattle accepted for the *Certified Angus Beef*® (CAB®) brand made up 16.5% of the entire carcass mix, ranging from an annual high of 21.1% in 2000 to 15.4% for the last couple of years *with* higher volume.