

Taking Fewer Chances

Rolling B Farms gets data on purchased cattle.

by *Miranda Reiman*

Ron Barrier of Rolling B Farms admits he's a gambling man. It's part of the nature of feeding cattle, but because industry newcomers may not know the risk, Barrier has a standard warning for investor customers.

"The cattle market is like going into the casino," says the Neola, Iowa, feedyard owner-operator. "You put in as much money as you can afford to lose and hope for the best."

He has found at least one way of increasing his odds though.

"I've become more involved with known genetics," Barrier says. "If I get to know the cattle pretty good, I know how they gain, convert and finish out."

For the past six years, he's been getting to know cattle bought from the same four western Nebraska ranches.

"It just helps to know they're going to perform well," he says, noting that increases his confidence in selling those cattle to first-time investors. "It helps keep the customer base up."

He's also been able to help those Nebraska ranchers with culling decisions by providing carcass and performance data back.

"If we have problem ones, the numbers that don't seem to do really well in the feedyard, we'll let them know," Barrier says. "They'll move that cow out of the herd and replace it with another one."

He buys some calves ranch-direct and others through the sale barn. Either way, he likes to know the health history.

Jackpot

In 2002, when Rolling B expanded to its current 5,000-head capacity, Barrier began

looking for ways to bring more cattle to the feedlot. He became an Iowa Tri-County Steer Carcass Futurity (TCSCF) yard and then licensed with Certified Angus Beef LLC (CAB) in 2004.

That relationship brought a pen of steers to Rolling B last year that hit the jackpot for his customers, literally. Barrier fed the winning 2006 National Angus Carcass Challenge (NACC) entry, which earned a group of five Alabama and Georgia producers \$5,000 in cash and other prizes.

Barrier says he's used to "good cattle" coming in through the futurity, but credits TCSCF staff with the marketing. All animals in the futurity are individually weighed at least four times throughout the feeding phase and are visually sorted into two different harvest dates.

"Darrell Busby and the others come up here and weigh them and look them over, and I send them out when they're done," Barrier says.

The Tri-County cattle fed at Rolling B are all enrolled in the CAB Feedlot-Licensing Program (FLP) database, which shows an overall CAB acceptance rate of 38% for the past three years.

"Everything at Rolling B — from facilities to management to employees — is top-notch," Gary Fike, CAB feedlot specialist, says. "It's a very well-maintained feedyard, and the whole team is committed to doing what's best for their customers."

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