

POST-WEANING MANAGEMENT TECHNIQUES AND RETAINED OWNERSHIP

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Our post-weaning management practices are not very refined, since we've only held over one group of feeder calves.

The following will be an attempt to share our experience.

In late summer of 1987, approximately 250 heifers weighing 500 pounds were selected for our first retained ownership endeavor. Approximately 50% of these heifers were Angus sired, with 25% Charolais sired and 25% Simbra sired. These heifers had been vaccinated for IBR, BVD, PI3 and Blackleg prior to weaning, and they were fed 5 pounds of a 12% molasses based liquid feed with 5% fat added. Ryegrass was planted and grazed. These heifers came off grass the first week of March weighing 710 pounds, which gave them .8 ADG.

Thirty days prior to shipping, these heifers were revaccinated for IBR, BVD, PI3 and Blackleg. This booster vaccination more than paid off. After being shipped 1,700 miles and fed for 120 days, we had no death losses and no heifers pulled for any sickness.

It is my personal opinion that calves hauled from 24 to 48 hours should be moved non-stop, and not unloaded and rested. This seems to be less stressful and traumatic on calves. (Fresh weaned calves rarely rest when unloaded anyway.) To accomplish this, good, reliable truckers are a must and two drivers per truck are best.

Timing on shipping cattle from Florida to the midwest is critical as far as the weather is concerned. It appears to me that early March is the best time. This allows cattle to arrive when the weather is not too severe, and gives them enough time on feed to be killed before the

weather turns too cold.

We have fed cattle on retained ownership three times and owned from 100% to 10% of the cattle. I personally think 50/50 ownership with the feed yard is the best way to go. You only receive 1/2 of any profit made, but you only bear 1/2 of the risk of any losses. I like to partner with the feed yard, because I feel the cattle will be better cared for and sold at the right time.

Two out of the three times we have fed cattle, we have used the futures markets and purchased "puts" on our cattle. This simply places a floor on our cattle when sold, which is as close to our breakeven price as we can get. This way, we use the futures markets as a way to minimize our losses and not as a way to make a profit. Also, when you consider the value of the feedlot performance and the carcass data you receive when you retain ownership in your cattle, the cost of a futures contract is not too bad. Good carcass and performance data can be used to advertise next year's calf crop.

Feedlot performance, yield grades, and % choice have been fairly easy pieces of information for us to obtain when we retain ownership, but information regarding the amount of muscling and fat have been vary elusive. We tagged a group of steers this year with USDA carcass tags, but neither the USDA personnel or the packing plant manager paid them any attention.

Finally, get to know the feedlot personnel where your cattle are. Select a feedlot manager who is honest, you feel comfortable with, and gives you the same service if you feed 100 or 1000 head. It is also

just as important to meet and know the cowboys who ride your pens. If they're doing a good job, thank them with a new pair of boots or a winter jacket. This is pretty cheap insurance that your cattle will be checked on time and properly.

In closing, I'd like to stress just how important it is to know how your cattle perform in the feedlot and on the rail. Value based marketing will happen. Good cattle will not bring a premium, but will avoid steep discounts. Without knowing how your cattle perform, there is no way intelligent decisions can be made in regard to breeding programs and marketing.

The following is an excerpt from "Livestock Market Digest", which further stresses these points.

But how do you find out how your cattle perform? "It seems the right to that kind of information passes with ownership", says Siegfried. "You can't expect it to be any other way. Here's why. The average price per pound

gain in our feedlots this year will probably be around 24 cents. If your cattle perform just 10 percent better than average in our lot, that means \$24.75 more in our pocket per head. Next year when we come around to buy your calves, we are not going to tell you that. We'll try to buy them at the market price, at the same time recommending that you don't make any major changes in your breeding program. If you balk at the price we offer, we might be reluctantly coaxed into giving you a penny more. You'll be happy and you can brag to your friends that you got a premium. But after having paid you 5% more per head, we still had \$19.75 more in your pocket. That is why it is important to find out how your cattle do in the feedlot and on the rail, and the only way to do this is by retaining ownership on some of your cattle through the feeding phase. By doing this, you are entitled to all the pertinent information."