



## *It's about time*

By Steve Suther

A steer finishes at USDA Prime Yield Grade 2 at the peak of seasonal demand, winning premiums of more than \$250. He and his owners wasted no time.

The steer was the product of timed breeding one day in April, in a heat-synchronized herd of heifers. They were managed so as to calve 30 to 45 days ahead of the main cow herd. That allowed them more time to adjust to being new mothers before rebreeding a bit later the next year on time-grazed pastures. But that's another story.

Before he was born, a veterinarian confirmed his arrival date. As that day drew near, the herd manager kept the heifers in a corral with feed every night. He let them out to the adjacent calving areas by day, and the plan led to predominantly daytime calving.

A routine entry in a calving book marks the early February birthday, but a checkmark says he nursed in time to get his dose of colostrum to build immunity. The "S" says he became a steer that day, too, number 549. Two days later, he and his mom were turned out with other new pairs to a dry grass paddock with lots of natural shelter and spring water.

Life was good, despite a few late winter storms, and then one day the pasture seemed to start turning green. Shortly thereafter, the "twos" were led into a big corral where calves got a round of shots and then they all moved out to bigger and greener pastures.

Life was even better and as the heifer rebred, the steer grew quickly. His genetics that promised rapid early growth and marbling delivered just that in the friendly environment. It got better still when the creep feeder arrived that summer. The corn-based ration influenced millions of cells to become marbling fat rather than external, waste fat.

There was another round of shots, but then back to normal for a few weeks. The creep was really hitting the spot for this steer. One late summer day the herd returned to that corral for still more shots, but this time the calves went left and the cows went right. It didn't seem right to the calves, but then there was that creep feeder. . .

Grass was running out, but the manager brought around whole bales of it and kept everything steady and convenient for several weeks. Then the steer and his compadres moved to a kind of cattle city. There may have been a truck involved, but the main thing is, the feed kept getting better. At least, it was just what the steer wanted.

The ration hit the bunks every day at the same time and just as the last of it was cleaned up by a bovine tongue, there came another delivery truck. The steer was putting on more than a few pounds, and his weight per day of age was truly impressive.

People knew he would do well. It was expected of him, based on his breeding, family and background. The steer adapted easily to feedlot life and kicked in the afterburners with the help of a few technological tools. Winter storms returned, but nothing to set him back. By the midpoint of feeding, a “real-time” ultrasound scan confirmed what all the people knew.

Of course, his days were numbered, and that was a good thing. After a strong finish, the steer and 30-some others from his pen took a truck ride to a harvest facility. There, the transformation took place as it has from the beginning of history: animals became meat.

Twenty-four hours later, in a temperature-monitored cooler, USDA graders and inspectors, aided by video cameras, determined final value for the shipment of beef on the rail. All of them made Choice or better, and most would go into a premium branded beef program.

After a few days or weeks of aging the product, consumers would buy it and cook it for the prescribed duration to make many consumers happy about mealtime.

Next time in *Black Ink*, Miranda Reiman will look at the benefits of sharing. Questions? Call toll-free at 877-241-0717 or e-mail [steve@certifiedangusbeef.com](mailto:steve@certifiedangusbeef.com).

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