

# for immediate release **NEWS**

## **Executive Office**

206 Riffel Rd.

Wooster, OH

44691-8588

Phone: 330/345-2333

Fax: 330/345-0808



## **Manhattan Office**

1107 Hylton Heights Rd.

Manhattan, KS

66502-2822

Phone: 785/539-0123

Fax: 785/539-2883

## **Japan Office**

Japan Business Center

WBG Marive East 14F

Nakase 2-6 Mihama-ku

Chiba-shi, Chiba 261-7114

Japan

Ph.: 011/81-43-297-3363

Fax: 011/81-43-297-3374

www.

certifiedangusbeef

.com

Contact: Miranda Reiman, CAB Industry Information Specialist  
(785) 539-0123, [mreiman@certifiedangusbeef.com](mailto:mreiman@certifiedangusbeef.com) (Brazle jpg on request)

May 2, 2007

## **Modern grass cattle concepts**

Cattle genetics have changed and backgrounders may need to react.

Frank Brazle, retired Kansas State University Extension beef specialist, has studied the stocker industry for more than 30 years.

“There used to be just acres and acres of light-weight cattle, and they had to be backgrounded,” he says. “The cows didn’t milk as well and the calves didn’t have the growth.”

Now most of those lighter calves are specific to the “fescue belt”—from southeast Kansas to the southern Appalachians—where endophyte fungus can retard milk production. Otherwise, calves are coming off the cow weighing more than ever before, says Brazle.

Mark McCully, supply development director for Certified Angus Beef LLC (CAB), notes that the American Angus Association has documented genetic improvement over time.

“From 1985 to 2005, the adjusted yearling weight EPD [expected progeny difference] climbed by 175 lb.,” he says. “That suggests the traditional methods for backgrounding Angus calves may need a little modification.”

Feedlot owner-manger Steve Peterson works with a number of backgrounding yards near his 4,400-head Lebanon, Kan., finishing yard.

“We try to maximize energy without pushing the cattle so hard that they finish at lighter weights. It all depends on the genetics and type of cattle,” he says. “I want them to have plenty of energy, which is very important if you’re feeding cattle toward a high grading endpoint.”

The CAB-licensed feeder says he grows some of the top cattle at 2.5 to 3 lb. a day and still feeds them 120 days in the feedlot.

Research shows supplementation on grazing programs benefits both the quality grade of those calves and carrying capacity of the land. University of Nebraska data found supplemented calves graded 67% Choice, compared to 51% on grass alone. The carrying capacity on that pasture also increased by 40%.

“You don’t ever want to slow down on nutrition because it’s costly to play catch up,” Peterson says. “Once you stop that marbling process, whether it’s stress or other factors, you’ve got several days to catch up. Sometimes you never do.”

McCully says today's practice of assembling groups of calves over time may need to be revisited.

"Many backgrounders gradually purchase calves and put them on a maintenance ration, or the bare minimum, while they're gathering enough animals to turn out together," he says. "Any time a calf is put on a restricted diet, it hurts marbling."

Health and stress can also suppress appetite and grade, Brazle says.

"If calves get sick and they're not performing up to a pretty decent level, that will affect grade later on," he says, suggesting growers place calves in a feedlot pen for a few days to "get the bawl and run out of them."

In his backgrounding yard animals are then moved to 10-acre grass traps, out of the mud and with room to roam.

"The spread of viruses is slowed down because they're not in such close proximity to each other," Brazle says. "It allows the viral vaccinations we give to start building up immunity to protect those calves."

With high corn prices and predictions of \$20 Choice-Select spreads, coordinating management between stockers and feeders could really add up.

"There will be more emphasis on performance, both the ability to gain and convert," Brazle says. "Cutability and grade will have more value, too."

END