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NEWS

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PHOTOS from Purina Mills, captions below

Strong start, finish for Purina Carcass Classic

Twenty-seven South Dakota and Nebraska ranchers sent more than 1,000 calves on a discovery mission last summer. The 2007-08 Purina Mills Carcass Classic feeding trials took place at eight cooperating feedlots in the two states, with harvest at Kansas and Nebraska packing plants this spring.

The demonstration project grouped calves by genetics and background to help them realize full potential and show the value of specific management strategies. That's according to Ron Bauer, Valentine, Neb., Project Leader for the Purina Mills, LLC, Cattle Business Group.

The company worked with Certified Angus Beef LLC (CAB) to get performance and individual carcass data back to each producer. The results showed above average quality cattle, Bauer said. "More importantly, producers were able to see the range of results and reflect on which sires and cows worked best when it comes to progeny performance and grade."

Cattle were weighed on arrival and again at the feeding midpoint. All cattle were scanned with ultrasound technology to help target optimum finish date. Regional producer meetings and tours coincided with the project, Bauer said.

Rod Larsen, Kimball, S.D., is one of the cooperating ranchers and feeders. "We have been able to get carcass data before, but not at this detailed and individual level," he said. Calves were also age- and source-verified.

Larsen early-weaned 42 steers from first-calf heifers, and custom-fed 125 additional early-weaned calves for other producers, including his sons Wyatt and Owen. "We normally wait until mid-September to wean, but these were weaned the first of August using the Purina Impact program," Larsen said.

He's not ready to convert his entire herd to early weaning, but Larsen said last year was "a great learning experience. We're going to try it again this year on some cattle, because we have already seen that it is a viable option. Now we can adjust our management a little, based on what we have learned."

Conventionally weaned Larsen calves finished 45 to 50 days later, maintaining the weaning age differential, he added. Carcass results were similar across all of Larsen calves, which are commercial, straightbred Angus. Historically, they grade better than 90% USDA Choice, with 40% to 65% *Certified Angus Beef*[®] (CAB[®]) brand acceptance, Larsen noted.

Cash Ostrander, Gordon, Neb., fed 100 early-weaned calves through the Minor Ranch Feedyard at Rushville, Neb. He fed 23 more at the Walkow Feedyard, near Gordon, and said overall he was “satisfied with performance and grade. We had heard good things about the Cargill plant at Fort Morgan, and we had a good experience,” he said.

Ostrander’s Willow Creek Ranch cattle are from an Angus-based cowherd that carries approximately one-eighth Limousin, sired by composite Angus-Limousin bulls. The Nebraska producer had obtained carcass data before, but had less confidence in it, he said. The Purina Carcass Classic also proved the value of an integrated weaning, nutrition and management program, Ostrander added.

Like most producers in the Classic, Lloyd Timmerman, manager of River Hills Ranch, Platte, S.D., said early weaning stands out as a key element of the project. “The 90 commercial calves we fed were weaned at a 125-day average age in late July, the earliest ever for us,” he said.

They fit an opportunity to sell some later-calving but rebred Angus-Braunveih cross cows, he added. “The calves started with a little Purina creep feed, then Impact at weaning and on to the ACCU-Ration finisher,” Timmerman explained. They were implanted once with Revalor-I and marketed in three groups based on ultrasound scan, with an average final age of 12 months.

“We only had four or five Selects and fewer Yield Grade 4s,” he said. Although the Choice-Select spread was relatively narrow when the cattle were sold, Timmerman pointed out that meant less worry about discounts for Select grade cattle. “This year, we will feed more straightbred Angus,” he added.

Larsen said he expects more interest in the Purina Mills feeding project this summer, adding, “We proved it could be done.”

Producers saw some variation in their cattle, and some will sort off different calves this summer, Bauer said. “If you took out the bottom 25%, we would be pretty close to 60% premium Choice and 4% Prime,” he said.

Yield Grade 4s, or over-finished cattle were held to 14% overall, a figure Bauer hopes to improve upon this year. “Among the pleasant surprises, we had close to 64% carcass yield on calves that were less than 1,200 lb. and not fat; feed efficiency was 5.51 on a dry-matter basis and it was surprisingly consistent from location to location,” he said.

“Most producers commented on how fast the cows got fat after the calves were taken off and how easily they wintered,” Bauer said. “It does appear that CAB “Best Practices” and Purina Mills “Nutritional Marbling” programs work.

“To start off last summer, we encouraged folks not to pick the cattle they thought would produce the best carcasses,” Bauer said. “We wanted to get an idea of the average cattle in the area. Now we’re asking them to try to pick cattle that will produce the top carcasses. Should be interesting.”

Here's a list of the participating feedlots in 2007-08:

Adamson Rocking J Ranch, Kilgore, Neb.

Start Date - 8/3/07

106 head -- 5 Ranches

Assman Land and Cattle, Mission, S.D.

Start Date - 7/31/07

109 head -- 4 Ranches

Churchill Rocking Arrow Ranch, Valentine, Neb.

Start Date - 8/14/07

108 head -- 3 Ranches

Minor Ranch, Rushville, Neb.

Start Date - 7/26/07

181 head -- 4 Ranches

R & L Feedyard, Kimball, S.D.

Start Date - 8/1/07

167 head -- 4 Ranches

River Hills Ranch, Platte, S.D.

Start Date - 7/2/07

90 head -- 1 Ranch

Walkow Feed Yard, Gordon, Neb.

Start Date - 8/22/07

47 head -- 2 Ranches

Weidner/Hermesen Feed Yard #1, Colome, S.D.

Start Date - 8/2/07

116 head -- 3 Ranches

The Carcass Classics are open to the prospect of new consignors this summer. Interested producers may contact Bauer at (402) 376-2780 or ron_bauer@purinamills.com.

PHOTO: (From left) Kimball, S.D., rancher Rod Larsen discusses early weaning and nutritional marbling with Purina marketing manager Layne Anderson and Carcass Classic project leader Ron Bauer, during a meeting in Larsen's shop this spring.

PHOTO: These early-weaned calves were finished and hit a high-quality carcass target by a year of age.

END