

# for immediate release **NEWS**

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## **Old ideas in a new light**

Market changes tell cattle feeders to take another look at what worked in the past. The rising cost of inputs make some of those dated theories more attractive today, according to Robby Pritchard, South Dakota State University (SDSU) animal scientist.

“If we talked about stuff 20 years ago and people didn’t pick it up,” he said, “it was either too big of a pain in the neck or corn was so cheap, we didn’t need to chase another option.” Pritchard addressed feeders at a seminar last fall co-sponsored by Pfizer Animal Health, Purina Mills, *Feedlot* magazine and Certified Angus Beef LLC (CAB).

“The pricing scenario is different than it used to be,” he pointed out. Those feeding cattle or working with a custom feeder have an interest in getting cattle to market quicker with less feed. Most are already doing the big things that improve feed efficiency: feeding ionophores in a more energy-dense diet, and using implants.

Now it’s time to rethink some of the little things and more complicated options we have, Pritchard said.

Matching type of cattle to grain processing method could improve efficiency. “There’s an interaction between the kind of grain processing and the days on feed, the kind of cattle and how much they’re going to be eating,” Pritchard said. “If you want to change efficiency, those numbers are huge.”

Research shows cattle fed for 150 or more days had better efficiencies on whole corn versus rolled corn. Short-fed cattle—120 days or less—benefit from further grain processing.

“How come everybody that doesn’t own a flaker rolls their corn? Can anybody give me a real good reason for spending money to reduce the energy content of your corn?” he asked.

Pritchard said if a feedlot is flaking grain, tweaking the ration beyond what the computer models suggest might be a way to pick up value.

“Once you put in a flaker, how much do you play with that idea anymore?” he asked. “Maybe exploring the associative effects of flake grains, looking for optimums, can squeeze out some efficiency in the future.”

The example comes from earlier University of Nebraska research on positive associative effects. When moving from high-moisture corn to dry corn, the expectation would be higher intakes, higher feed-to-gain ratios, but higher average daily gain.

“All of our software just connects those dots with straight lines,” Pritchard said. The actual optimum in the five-trial Nebraska summary was a combination of high-moisture and dry corn. The intake went up, but the feed-to-gain ratio dropped significantly; gains improved.

Bunk management subtleties deserve more attention now, too.

“The pen that’s off by 5% on intake is one cost,” Pritchard said. “Part of a pen being off by 20% on intake and the rest of the pen holding their own is the same DMI (dry matter intake) but is way more expensive.”

Both will show up the same when calling bunks, but the ending cost-of-gain could vary by as much as \$2.50 per hundredweight (cwt.).

“Bunk management is something we really have to watch,” he said, “and we can’t just watch to see if they’re staying within 5% from day to day.”

Issues may start before the feed is even delivered. “Batching, mixing, and compositional drift on our ingredients are a big, big deal,” Pritchard noted. “As you go into more alternative feeds, that’s going to become even more problematic.”

At SDSU’s research feedlot, pens of cattle are fed in the same order from the feed mixer batch every day. With one ration, there was a \$20.68/cwt. difference between being fed first and third out of the load. He said it was likely a problem getting feed additives distributed evenly.

“As imprecise as an ionophore test is, you won’t see that on a lab report. If it’s within 20% of what it’s supposed to be, that’s the number,” Pritchard said. “Biologically, the cattle are much more sensitive than that.”

Unless a feedyard has a consistent feeding pattern, these details are lost.

“You can’t see that \$20 in your yard, but that doesn’t mean that the inefficiency isn’t out there,” he said.

Other suggestions for increasing efficiency include feeding lighter cattle and focusing on cattle comfort.

Online copies of the event presentation can be found at [http://www.cabpartners.com/events/past\\_events/index.php](http://www.cabpartners.com/events/past_events/index.php).

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