

for immediate release **NEWS**

January 28, 2010

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

Laura Nelson, Industry Information Specialist, LNelson@certifiedangusbeef.com
Certified Angus Beef LLC (330) 345-2333

Photo available at: <http://www.cabpartners.com/news/photos/Lake.jpg>

Exit on beef's fast lane?

Research explores a low-cost detour on the road to high-quality beef

Cattlemen know marbling is important, and they keep hearing about ways to give it a head start. Early weaning onto a high-starch grain ration sounds promising but could it be risky? The price of corn and potential for lighter carcass weights keep some producers from taking that route.

But what if there was a way to rev up the marbling motor, then coast for a few months of cost savings before putting the pedal to the metal for a strong finish? Preliminary data from an ongoing tri-state study suggests a way for top-grading carcasses to be higher yielding.

Researchers from the University of Wyoming (UW), South Dakota State University (SDSU) and the USDA-Agriculture Research Service (ARS) in Mandan, N.D., hope to quantify the economic benefits in the equation.

“The hypothesis is this: if we stimulate the calf’s marbling development early in life, then, even if we take a break from that, we can re-fill those adipocytes later in life. We can still have carcasses that grade just like early-weaning cattle, but they will have bigger, heavier carcasses,” Scott Lake says. The UW livestock specialist says that combination is vital to profitability.

“There is no question as to if marbling is important,” Lake said in his December presentation at the Range Beef Cow Symposium. He cited the 2005 National Beef Quality Audit in noting, “The No. 1 concern of both beef packers and merchandisers is insufficient marbling.” Those end-users transmit consumer demand signals that affect prices for some cattle.

“If we have higher-producing cattle, buyers for the branded products are going to know that, and hopefully we will be able to take advantage of that premium that is available for them,” Lake says.

Demand for Certified Angus Beef® (CAB®) brand product has paid producers more than \$250 million in premiums for cattle that meet the brand’s quality standards over the past decade.

But Lake says there could be more – cattlemen need those extra premiums, plus more pounds developed with lower input costs, to provide a better chance for profit. The quest for quality plus quantity led him to research the impact of calf nutritional management on quality grade.

In the joint study, Lake and his colleagues are focusing on strategies that will increase quality grade and carcass weights while decreasing feed costs. Their model starts by weaning calves at 100-120 days of age.

“There are a lot of benefits to early weaning,” Lake says. “These calves are known to grade extremely well and there are a lot of added benefits to the dam.” But, he warns, no system is perfect.

“While these calves are younger when they finish, they are actually on feed longer. The problem with that is, corn isn’t cheap,” he points out. “So we need to strategically maximize corn intake when it matters most.”

The research model puts that right after weaning at 100 days of age, when calves should be pushed to gain on a high-starch grain diet. Research supports the theory that nutrition at this point affects the calf’s adipocytes or fat-cell development.

“We’re pushing them harder than the average cattlemen would think you should, but we need to get them up to the feed bunk, adapted to the high-starch diet, and gaining more than 3 pounds a day right off the bat,” Lake says. That will stimulate more marbling potential that will only be realized in the finishing phase, he says.

Sure, that puts calves on a costly corn diet earlier than usual, but better to get started then.

“If you think about the size of a 120-day-old calf, they don’t eat very much,” Lake says. “So in effect, we’ve reduced the lifetime corn intake in terms of quantity and increased the calf carcass quality.”

After 100 days of full feed, calves go on a lower-quality, cheaper feed such as corn stalks, winter range or whatever is locally available during the next, less-critical developmental period.

“We slow them down and allow that skeletal and muscular growth to catch up and develop,” Lake says. “Then we have more of a yearling finish on those cattle without the smaller-framed, early-weaned calf that model is used to.”

Calves go back on a finishing diet for the final 75 to 90 days to capitalize on the marbling development that began after earlier.

“In theory, this is a lot cheaper system because we are feeding them less corn over their lifetime. But we need our economist to tell us that’s right,” Lake says.

“We need to prove this model works. Then we need to make sure it’s meeting the needs of branded programs and getting the producer some premiums for raising those cattle,” Lake says. A final report on the two-year study should be available by next summer.

END