

**The value of marbling in consumer acceptance of beef.** L.R. Corah<sup>1</sup> *Certified Angus Beef LLC, Wooster, OH*

In 1925, the USDA implemented the quality grading system to address consumer confusion related to meat quality. Since that original role, marbling has become an important component of meat quality in both the domestic and global marketplace. Most research studies have shown that as marbling levels increase, the overall consumer acceptability increases. The triad of flavor, tenderness, and juiciness are considered by most scientists to be the key components of eating satisfaction. Although the magnitude will vary by study, marbling contributes to each of these three attributes. Recent research at Texas Tech University shows that tenderness is important, but flavor is two and a half times as important in overall consumer acceptability of beef. In the past eight years, cattle markets have started to reflect these consumer preferences as the Choice-Select and Premium Choice-Low Choice spreads have widened from historical levels of \$2-4/cwt to \$10-12/cwt in the last three years. A recent Cattle-Fax analysis suggests that the impact of Premium Choice and Prime adds \$500 million plus annually of added value to the producer.

**Key Words:** Marbling, Consumer Acceptance, Beef