

Animal science: Southeastern calves still improving

For decades, cattle from the southeastern U.S. have sold at a discount compared to cattle from the Midwest. Data says they deserve better, according to a beef cattle specialist with Certified Angus Beef LLC. Earlier this month, Gary Fike presented on feedlot performance and carcass traits at the Southern Section meetings of the American Society of Animal Science in Orlando, Fla.

An eight-year study shows that a higher percentage of Angus-type calves from the Southeast qualified for the *Certified Angus Beef*[®] brand. That could be due to an age difference, but the study shows a distinct and widening health advantage over Midwestern calves, too.

Calves involved in the study were from 19 states, fed a common diet at 18 Iowa feedlots through the Tri-County Steer Carcass Futurity (TCSCF). They were sorted to harvest after visually evaluated to have one centimeter of fat cover, Fike reported.

“Southeastern cattle have been discounted on the perception that they weren’t as high in quality or growth potential, and had more sickness and mortality than northern buyers would tolerate,” Fike said. “TCSCF data showed no basis for those discounts.”

The average daily gain was similar for both geographic regions, about 3 pounds (lb.) per head per day. But there were some differences, and they were generally more pronounced than in a 2007 analysis of similar TCSCF data.

The mortality rate was slightly higher in the feedlot for the Midwest calves than the southeastern region. The Midwest had a 1.81% mortality rate versus 1.35% in the Southeast, Fike said. In the 2007 study, those numbers were 1.76% and 1.43%, respectively. The morbidity, or sickness rate, also widened by nearly a point in favor of the healthier Southeastern calves.

Misconceptions on Midwest cattle are also common, said Fike. “Since travel is not as far for producers in the Midwest, some believe they won’t need as long a weaning period or as many vaccinations.” As for cattle that arrive out of the Southeast, the weaning period certainly varies, but there is always a much longer travel time, Fike added.

Study results show that more Southeast Angus-type calves qualified for the *Certified Angus Beef*[®] brand with 18.4% compared to 16.9% from the Midwest. In addition, cattle from the Southeast had a higher percentage grading USDA Prime.

The main trait to consider between the geographic areas is profitability, Fike said. After considering all related costs as well as feedlot and carcass traits, the Southeastern calves had a higher profit per head of \$37.34, compared to \$23.79 per head for the Midwestern calves.

In later comments, Fike noted that the profit gap was \$2.23-per-head wider in the current study than in the 2007 analysis. He said the 2002-09 data showed the Southeastern calves were slightly older than their Midwestern contemporaries and required 7.2 fewer days on feed. The abstract for the study is available at

www.cabpartners.com/news/research.