

A STORY OF A STEAK

RESPONSIBLE BEEF

THREE STEPS TO IMPROVE THE QUALITY OF CATTLE AT FINISHING

U.S. cattle feeders have drastically improved feeding practices during the past decade. However, there are a few steps that may help cattle feeders produce more beef economically, while also maintaining quality. Improving margin in the feedyard is always paramount, and part of this equation is achieving optimum carcass weights while improving quality grade.

Step 1: START WITH HIGH QUALITY GENETICS

According to data from the U.S. Department of Agriculture, the cattle herd has been declining since 1980, yet the amount of beef continues to rise. This is due largely to the improving nature of cattle genetics and finishing those cattle to their optimum harvest points. When cattle feeders use high-quality cattle, they can expect to see cattle gain more resourcefully.

Wade T. Nichols, Ph.D., technical services with Merck Animal Health, says, "Calves currently entering the feedyard have the ability to grow more rapidly and efficiently to greater live and carcass weights than cattle at any time in our past history. Cattle with high-quality genetics have been bred to finish economically at ever-increasing market weight while maintaining quality and yield grades."

"CATTLE WITH HIGH-QUALITY GENETICS HAVE BEEN BRED TO FINISH ECONOMICALLY AT EVER-INCREASING MARKET WEIGHT WHILE MAINTAINING QUALITY AND YIELD GRADES."
- Wade T. Nichols, Ph.D., Merck Animal Health

Step 2: UTILIZE GROWTH TECHNOLOGIES

Dr. Nichols says that an implant program is undoubtedly the most important factor for improving margin in cattle. Before cattle arrive at a feedyard, managers need to decide if they want to implement an aggressive strategy or a more conservative strategy. "The more aggressive strategies improve growth and feedyard performance to a greater degree but require more management by the feedyard. This strategy utilizes the high-priced feed rations of today more efficiently by improving growth and reducing cost of gain. However, the feedyard needs to understand that the cattle will need to be finished to their physiological end-points to achieve the grade they might expect," says Dr. Nichols. "A more conservative strategy will elicit less of a growth response and will not reduce cost of gain quite as much, but it will allow for cattle to finish at lighter weights and can be more forgiving if cattle are sold early due to market demands."

While feedyard managers should consult their nutritionist to determine the best implant program in their yard, Dr. Nichols suggests Revalor[®]-XS (trenbolone acetate and estradiol) for an all-around implant strategy to improve performance and maintain grade across a wide variety of feeding and selling options without the need to reimplant cattle. Revalor-XS has been shown in a number of research trials to allow fed cattle to marble earlier in the feeding period while maintaining feedyard performance.¹ This phenomenon is due to the proprietary slow release technology used in Revalor-XS and less stress on the cattle by leaving them in their pen rather than reimplanting.

Step 3: SORT CATTLE DURING THE FINAL FEEDING PROCESS

Sorting cattle decreases the chances of revenue loss due to carcass discounts while improving uniformity and revenue. Traditionally, cattle in feedyards were sorted visually during the receiving process or mid-feeding. However, cattle feeders are now learning the benefits of sorting cattle with technology — focusing on both quality and yield grade — later in the feeding process at 50-80 days before harvest.

"Sorting cattle later in the feeding process decreases the chances of extreme carcass discounts," says Dr. Nichols. "This process of sorting gives you more uniform, optimal carcass weight groups, which decreases your chances for discounts and revenue loss."

Finishing cattle is an intense process of evaluating many factors — market prices, feed costs, cattle weights — in the hopes of achieving the highest possible margin. "By adopting a few valuable practices, such as using high-quality genetics, utilizing growth technologies and sorting cattle in the final feeding process, cattle feeders can see more benefits at market by producing more quality beef," says Dr. Nichols.



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¹ Data on file, Merck Animal Health.

A withdrawal period has not been established for Revalor in pre-ruminating calves. Do not use in calves to be processed for veal. For complete information, refer to product label.

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