Cattlemen Gain Performance Information through Retained Ownership Program

The Situation

Beef production involves several phases from the time the calf is born until the consumer is enjoying a prime rib dinner. Unfortunately, information transferal is not good in the beef industry. Often the rancher does not know how his cattle perform in the feedlot or packing house. It is difficult to produce the right kind of cattle without accurate evaluation of performance in all phases of production.

Our Response

University of Idaho faculty developed an Idaho Total Beef Education program with input from ranchers, bankers, feeders, packers and allied industries. Ranchers participate by enrolling a sample of their calves (5 to 25 head) in a feeding trial. The calves are preconditioned (weaned, vaccinated) on the ranch and delivered to Bruneau Cattle Company Feedlot. The feeding trial starts in November and ends in May when the finished cattle are processed at Iowa Beef Processors (IBP, Boise). Each owner receives feedlot, carcass and economic information on his calves.

Objects of this integrated resource management (IRM) program are to help ranchers (1) broaden their knowledge of the whole beef industry; (2) gain feedlot, carcass and economic information on their own cattle; (3) investigate alternative marketing options; (4) identify variables that affect profitability; (5) compare heifer and steer performance; (6) manage risks and (7) apply knowledge to their own ranch management.

Educational methods include: (1) rancher participation through ownership of cattle; (2) computer projection of anticipated performance, (3) monthly progress reports; (4) feedlot tour and update; (5) market reports; (6) paper hedges to track live cattle and future prices; (7) individual animal, ranch and pen data; (8) performance and financial analysis; (9) packing house tour and carcass viewing and (10) published reports and articles.

Achievements

The retained ownership program was determined a success. Seventy-three ranches consigned 1,547 calves (1,170 steers, 377 heifers) to the “A to Z Retained ownership, Inc.” For the five feeding trials implemented in 1992-97. Cattle performed similarly each year. Marketing date, feedlot average daily gain and price premium or discount based on carcass quality and conformity account for most of the variation in profitability among animals. Surveys of the participants indicated a high level of satisfaction (96%) with the program.

Participant comments:

One rancher summarized, “helping ranches produce what consumers want requires knowing what their animals will do, and that’s basically the purpose of the program.”
Other comments about the program include:

- "Every participant has learned something."
- "I’ve been surprised at the profitability variation between the high calf and the low calf."
- "I’ve changed bulls to improve my quality grade without sacrificing average daily gain."
- A purebred Hereford breeder uses the information to determine how well his bulls are doing and which bloodlines to use.
- "It gives me an overall idea of the entire cattle business. You follow your animals all the way and it gives you a vision of the whole process."
- A rancher used his calves’ performance data to help sell calves via a satellite video auction.

The Future

Plans are to continue the program. Each year, participants evaluate the program and suggest changes and interest emphasis. Educational programs are designed to address those interest topics and current situations. The 1997-98 feeding trial is in progress.

Participating Faculty

Pat Momont, Beef Specialist
Neil Rimbey, Range Economist
Gordon Keetch, Adams County
Fred Edmiston, Washington County
Jim Hawkins, Custer County
Will Cook, Gem County
Kathy Roy, Canyon County
Bob Loucks, Lemhi County

For More Information

Gordon C. Keetch, Extension Educator
University of Idaho
Adams County Cooperative Extension System
203 1/2 S. Galina
P.O. Box 43
Council, ID 83612
Phone: 208-253-4279
Fax: 208-253-4880
E-mail: adams@uidaho.edu

it97am01 10/97