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Official Feeder Cattle Grade Changes

by Dale Miller

The Agricultural Marketing Service of USDA is changing the official U.S. standards for grades of feeder cattle. These standards were last modified in September of 1979 when frame size and muscle thickness became the two primary criteria for determining grades. With the introduction and use of numerous exotic breeds in the U.S., significant changes have taken place in feeder cattle type since the standards were modified. Although originally intended to describe commingled cattle from small farms in the eastern U.S., these grades have become the descriptive standard of choice by most of the feeder cattle industry nationwide. In addition, these standards have served to educate producers about the importance of frame size and muscling in determining harvest-ready weights.

In an attempt to quantify these changes, USDA entered into a project with Colorado State University (CSU) to determine: (1) the live weights at which the current population of Large, Medium, and Small framed feeder steers and heifers attain a degree of finish associated with a carcass quality grade of low Choice; and (2) an effective approach for stratification of feeder cattle into muscle thickness categories that reflect eventual differences in carcass muscularity and ultimate USDA Yield Grade.

Results of the CSU study showed that the weight limits for Medium frame cattle were too low. The consistency of the cattle population had changed drastically over the past 20 years since the standards were initiated. The number of popular breeds in the 1970's was a mere handful compared to nearly 100 registered breeds today. Most of these breeds are larger framed breeds that have had quite an impact on the mature and finished weights of our cattle supply.

The industry also saw a need to change the muscling specifications so thicker muscling is recognized. This was particularly true at graded feeder cattle sales, where under the 1979 system, the very best muscled cattle were sold in the same pen with cattle that have muscling "close" to dairy type. These restructured muscling guidelines, recommended by the States through the National Livestock Grading and Marketing Association and used in the CSU study, distribute cattle more evenly among the muscle grades.

Therefore, it was proposed in a September 23, 1999, Federal Register notice that the minimum weights specified for frame size grades be increased to more accurately reflect today's beef cattle population. It was also proposed to adjust the muscling grades to more effectively identify carcass USDA Yield Grade differences among feeder cattle and reflect current marketing practices.

How these grade changes will

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Upcoming Events...

Dec 25 Christmas Day
For the year 2001

Jan 6 Waynesville NC BCIP Bull Sale
Waynesville

Jan 13 Butner NC BCIP Bull Sale
Oxford

Feb 12 Lincoln's Birthday

Feb 14 [Valentine's Day](#)

Feb 16-17
NCCA Annual Conference,
Hickory, NC

Feb 19 Washington's Birthday

Feb 28 Ash Wednesday

Mar 16 St. Patrick's Day

April 13 Good Friday

Apr 25 Professional Secretaries Day

Apr 26 5-County Beef Tour,
4 Farms, Hosted by Franklin
County

May 13 Mother's Day

May 19-20
NC Jr Beef Round-Up,
Winston-Salem, NC

May 30 Piedmont NC Area Hay Expo &
Field Day
Person County

Sept 28-30
[Dixie Classic Fair](#)
[Winston-Salem, NC](#)

If I have left something out please let me know. Linda_Kern@ncsu.edu

Winter Feed Supplementation

Beecher C. Allison
Extension Livestock Specialist
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The predominant winter feeds for beef cattle are hay and corn silage. Supplemental feed is often necessary to obtain the most efficient use of these forages. Concentrate feeds such as corn or SBOM and minerals that are fed in small amounts to improve the utilization of forage and animal performance are referred to as supplements. Supplements are normally added to the ration to correct a deficiency of nutrients such as energy, protein, vitamins or minerals in the feedstuff being fed. Supplements may also contain other additives such as antibiotics, ionophors or anthelmintics.

The following questions should be considered to determine if a supplement is needed and how much:

- *What classification of animal is to be fed?*
- *What is the size and condition of the animal?*
- *What is the stage of production of the animal?*
- *What is the level of performance desired?*
- *What is the nutrient content of the forage?*

A forage analysis is the best way to determine nutrient content of the forage to be fed. In general high quality hay is harvested at an early stage of maturity and is leafy, green, pliable, free of dust and mold and has a pleasing aroma. Poor quality hay is generally stemmy, late-cut, brown, moldy and may contain weeds or foreign material. Poor management or unfavorable weather at harvest time may result in poor quality hay. Poor hay is undesirable, but may be fed to mature cows

under proper management.

Different classifications of cattle have different nutritional requirements as will be noted when reviewing nutritional requirement tables. This means the different types of cattle; yearlings, gestating cows, lactating cows, etc., should be fed separately if possible to keep feed costs low. For example, mature cows in early to middle gestation fed good quality hay may not need any energy or protein supplementation. In contrast, yearling replacement heifers should be gaining 1.0 to 1.5 pounds per day and need to be consuming about 1.5 pounds of crude protein and 10 pounds of total digestible nutrients (TDN) per day. If these heifers are fed average quality hay they will probably require an additional three to five pounds of concentrate to provide for adequate growth to reach a desirable breeding size by 14 to 16 months.

Particular attention should be given to first calf heifers. Ideally they should be two years old at calving time. In addition to providing an abundant supply of milk for their calf, they should be gaining approximately a half-pound per day and re-breeding. Adequate nutrition can be the difference in these first calf heifers re-breeding or remaining open.

There are many feedstuffs that may be included in a supplement, or used as a supplement. Corn is an ideal energy supplement but other grains may also be used. Soybean meal or cottonseed meal are the commonly used protein supplements. However, by-product feeds high in energy or protein, such as soyhulls or corn gluten, are also commonly used as supplements. Non-protein nitrogen (NPN) sources, such as urea, may also be utilized in supplements; however, when using NPN sources care should be taken to follow the recommended mixing and feeding procedures. Cattle weighing less than 500 pounds do not utilize NPN

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affect the graded feeder cattle sales held across North Carolina will be determined by the Feeder Cattle Committee, a group that meets each January in Statesville to establish the governing rules and sales schedules for the organization.

A copy of the official grade standards from USDA can be obtained by going to the following web site:

<http://www.ams.usda.gov/lsg/stand/standards/fedr-cat2000.pdf>

An article will appear in the October issue of the Carolina Cattle Connection listing agents as a contact for this information. Please let me know if you have difficulty locating or printing the USDA publication on the grading changes.

Adapted from Federal Register: June 27, 2000 (Volume 65, Number 124) ■



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as efficiently as larger, older cattle.

Whole shelled corn is often fed as an energy supplement. Corn does not have to be ground, as the cost of grinding is about equal to the value of increased efficiency resulting from grinding. The primary reason for grinding corn is to enable mixing other things with it for feeding. Finely ground corn, such as that prepared for swine, should be avoided. A coarse grind or crushed corn is better for cattle feed and is preferable for mixing.

Cattlemen should provide mineral supplements containing salt, calcium and phosphorus. The Calcium:phosphorus ratio should be maintained at approximately 1.5:1.0. Other minerals that may be required in a mineral supplement are selenium, copper and zinc. Cattlemen may mix their own mineral supplements or there are several companies that provide excellent mineral mixtures for free-choice supplementation.

Vitamins are normally not critical with the possible exceptions of vitamin A if poor quality forages are being fed or B-vitamins for stressed or ill cattle.

Supplements come in many forms that may be mixed on the farm or purchased as commercial mixtures. They may be purchased in bulk or sacked, pelleted, in blocks or as liquids. To determine the most economical source first determine the cost per unit of nutrient. Blocks and liquid supplements are often more expensive but are also more convenient.

Even if only a very small quantity of supplement is required to balance a ration, it will most likely make a tremendous difference in the performance of the cattle fed. When making nutritional decisions always strive to be practical and cost effective in your decisions. ■

Students Looking for Internship...

By: Dale Miller

A number of Animal Science students, predominantly from the Agricultural Institute, have asked about internship opportunities for the summer of 2001. Most of these students have some background in agriculture and would like to gain experience working with a beef cattle operation. Naturally some have more experience than others. Some consideration may need to be given to living quarters depending on the farm location.

If you have producers who might be interested in hiring a student for summer employment on their farm, please forward their name and contact information so I can get this to the interested students. This could be a good opportunity for both the students and your producers.

Bull Test Sale Catalogs:

The Waynesville Sale catalog has gone out. Be looking for it online.

Butner Sale catalog will be going out next week.



Holiday Closing

Our Office will be closed December 21-26 Dale, Roger and Linda will also be out the 27-29.

Our office will also be closed on January 1.

HAPPY NEW YEAR'S!



[Past EAH e-Newsletters](#)

GRADED CATTLE SALES CONTINUE TO PROVIDE CONSIGNORS FINANCIAL PREMIUMS

by: Dale Miller and Roger McCraw

The North Carolina beef cattle industry, like other states in the southeastern region, is comprised of many, relatively small cow-calf operations. Owners of these small farms may also produce any number of crops, raise swine or poultry, or be employed by area businesses. Due to this industry structure, most southeastern cattle producers are unable to take advantage of economies of scale available to larger cattle operations. For this reason, graded, co-mingled ownership cattle sales were initiated in North Carolina in 1952 and have remained a viable marketing alternative for commercial producers since that time. Graded sales offer small producers the opportunity to work jointly and increase the relative size of their offerings and subsequently the prices received for their cattle.

Historically, North Carolina graded sales have allowed producers to receive an additional \$20 to \$40 dollars per head consigned when compared with similar cattle sold through weekly auctions, simply by selling similar types of cattle in larger lots. Trained personnel from the North Carolina Department of Agriculture grade all cattle, which are then commingled in uniform lots according to grade, sex, and breed, and penned with similar cattle in 100-pound increments. Graded sales are a cooperative effort between participating livestock markets, the N.C. Cattlemen's Association, the N.C. Department of Agriculture and the N.C. Cooperative Extension Service.

Although these sales offer consignors substantial premiums, the percentage of North Carolina's calf crop sold in this method has historically remained at or below 10 percent. Reasons for such a small percentage are uncertain but include a lack of time or willingness by producers to perform required management procedures such as castration of male calves and vaccination for Blackleg and Malignant Edema. Other reasons include a specific date for graded sales each year as compared to the availability of weekly auctions.

Recently, more moderate and larger sized operations are selling calves direct from the farm. These cattle are often more valuable to prospective buyers due to improved health which improves feedlot performance. Such cattle are more genetically uniform than

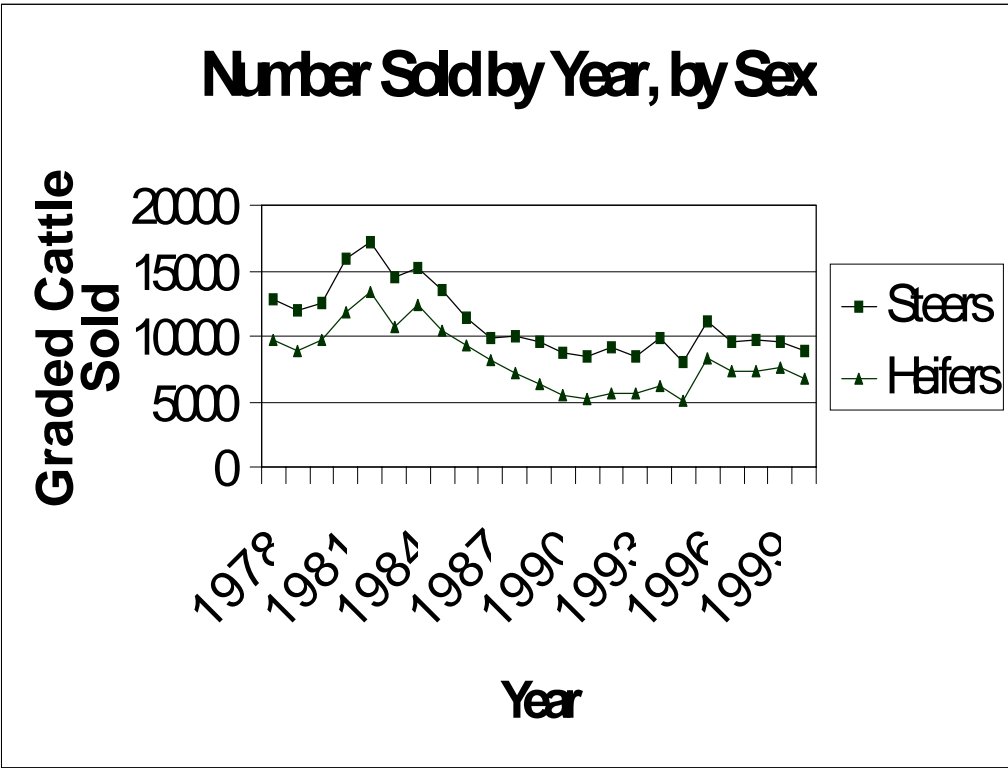
individually purchased cattle and are sold in larger lots, reducing transportation expenses. Many producers who sell private treaty establish their asking prices based on local graded sale averages. Although graded sale numbers have declined over the past 20 years, many of these cattle now sell direct from farms reducing inefficiencies in the marketing system and financially benefiting both buyer and seller.

A recent comparison of graded sales and weekly auctions held during the same time frame demonstrates the increased value associated with selling cattle in larger uniform lots. The following table summarizes this comparison where weekly auction prices, as reported by the Market News Section of the N.C. Department of Agriculture, were averaged by week and compared to graded sale averages for sales held during the same timeframe. As evidenced by the average price differences, graded sales are indeed a good marketing option for commercial beef producers. Consignors to this year's graded sales received an additional \$222,000 for their steers and \$200,000 for their heifers, compared to selling in weekly auctions. This average premium does not include the additional savings consignors receive at graded sales through payments based on in-weights versus payments based on out-weights in weekly auctions. We estimate this difference to be at least 3%, which would amount to an additional sale weight of 17 lbs. (570 lbs average weight times 3%) at the average per hundredweight price of about \$86.50, or an additional impact of about \$14.70/hd. These savings would add \$230,000 to receipts of consignors to graded sales this fall.

Combined, the net increase in income for the calves sold through graded sales exceeds \$650,000 or \$41 per calf. This difference amounts to a premium of 9% over weekly sales on average.

A complete summary of the 2000 NC graded sales is available at the following website:

http://www.cals.ncsu.edu/an_sci/extension/animal/market/Ahmarket.html



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