

Angus Breeders Discuss Production Efficiency

"American beef producers can never expect to still make of their product by producing an inferior one," J. C. Holbert, vice president of the American Angus Association from Bettendorf, Iowa, told more than 400 persons attending the recent Western States Angus Forum in Reno, Nevada.

"If we drop the quality of our beef by lowering grading standards we are going to open up the door to more imported beef and meat substitutes," he said. "If we do away with the flavor, juiciness and tenderness of beef we will have done much to destroy our market."

Holbert contended that Angus breeders must maintain quality while using every means available to produce

even more efficient breeding cattle and steers.

Holbert's remarks keynoted the two-day Forum and Western National Angus Futurity Show in which cattle breeders, meats researchers and beef merchandisers explored efficiency in beef cattle production and recommended steps to improve profits and consumption of beef in the United States during the 1970's.

There is no case to be made to profit in the cattle business, Floyd D. Miller, secretary of the American Angus Association, told the group. "But one word that pretty well sums it up is efficiency. That's why we are going to explore every method which will make Angus herds more efficient."

The question of cow size and

efficiency was examined by a panel of commercial cattlemen.

One can't talk about cow size and efficiency until he first knows what kind of calf he wants to produce, said Fay Crusch of Barnville, Montana, who has been producing first-class steers in his herds for the past 14 years.

"I want steers that weigh between 550 and 600 pounds at 205 days of age that make good growth in the feedlot and finish to USDA Choice at 1,000 to 1,100 pounds and produce the kind of carcass that the packers want and the housewife likes to serve her family. If I save my replacement heifers from the cows that produce this kind of steers then they should eventually produce the right kind of steers," he said.

"My cows range from 1,050 to 1,200 pounds and I don't want them any larger because they would cost too much to winter."

Crusch explained that he had found little correlation between the size of his cows and their producing ability. Larger cows, he said, are the top producers according to his records, but there is no marked correlation. One reason for this, he said, is that there are many factors other than size which determine top production.

Crusch emphasized he wants cows that weigh 1,100 to 1,200 pounds and he wants them to get this growth early. Last October, his replacement heifers weighed 930 pounds at 19 months of age. This means they had obtained 80 per cent of their growth and that they

would gain only 20 per cent more for the next two years. "We want cattle that show a sharp growth curve and then level off at the weight we want. If you want 1,050 pound steers this is where they should level off."

"We need cows that produce a slaughter steer that will weigh 1,000 to 1,150 pounds at 14 to 17 months of age and grade USDA Choice with Number 2 or 3 cutability," said Glen Edmann, a commercial cowman from Willows, California, who is deeply involved in crossbreeding. "If you have a cow that will do this I don't care what she weighs, but there is only one way we are going to find this kind of a cow and that is by keeping accurate records."

Edmann has been keeping production records on his herd for 12 years. The calf crop averages 604 pounds at 205 days. His cows average 1,291 pounds as eight-year-olds in good condition about 20 days before calving.

"I've gone back over the past 10 years and selected the top and bottom 10 per cent of our cows based upon production. The top 10 per cent averaged 1,296 pounds just before calving and the bottom 10 per cent averaged 1,201 pounds. This means that the top 10 per cent of the herd weighs 95 pounds more than the bottom 10 per cent. Also, the top 10 per cent weighs only 35 pounds more than the average of our herd. So you see there isn't anything extremely dramatic about weights or averages."

"Our cows have a mature weight of from 1,100 to 1,200 pounds and I would like to have them a little larger," said Walter McEwen of Burns, Oregon, who runs a large commercial cow herd in the semi-desert region of Eastern Oregon. "Good range country in our area will handle one cow per 10 acres per month and bad range land requires about 18 to 20 acres per head per month."

The panel discussion was followed by a live animal demonstration in which the audience used live animals and their records to select replacement heifers and to cull cows from a group of cows and their weaning age and yearling age offspring. It illustrated that cows that look very much alike can differ greatly in their production efficiency.

"Efficiency has to determine size of beef cattle," George Strathearn, manager of the Grand National Livestock Show in San Francisco, told the group. "The beef cattle market is tied to the USDA Choice grade, and we can't forget that the cattle we breed have to be able to grow fast and efficiently to market weights and grade USDA Choice."

"Some 80 per cent of all cattle slaughtered are fed cattle, so we need marbling in our cattle. We need growth and efficiency, too," he stressed. "But cattle that keep on growing past market weight and still won't grade aren't efficient."

Strathearn stressed that top bulls were impractical and inefficient in his operation of commercial cattle. "We use 1,600 to 1,700 pound bulls that get us a 90 per cent calf crop and produce cattle that packers prefer. This size of cattle is big enough."

Strathearn also told breeders they must become more involved in their business. Breeders have a big promotion job to do and there is a need to close the gap between purebred and commercial cattle.

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