

Beef Grading System Changes Proposed

Proposed changes in the federal beef grading system that will voluntarily help stabilize consumer beef prices without sacrificing beef quality have been recommended to government and industry leaders by American-International Charolais Assn. of Houston.

"The consumer stands to gain most from these proposed revisions, which are many years overdue," stated J. Scott Henderson, executive secretary of the 18,000-member breed registry.

"The past few years have seen the emergence in consumer preferences for young, lean beef

of optimum palatability of flavor," he said. "This is beef that has been finished on grain, and more recently is young beef without excessive fat cover. All beef breeds, through their performance-measuring programs, advocate the production of this type of beef. Yet, present grading systems penalize those younger, leaner, more flavorful beef by requiring larger and unnecessary amounts of marbling."

Henderson pointed out that researchers agree that "marbling" - or tiny flecks of fat intermingled within the beef tissues - has essentially no effect on palatability, tenderness or flavor of younger beef. However, marbling and maturity are the major criteria for present grading standards.

These larger amounts of marbling as required by present standards do little but add feeding time and costs to finishing an animal and subsequently increases beef costs to the consumer, he added.

The Charolais proposal gives more consideration for carcasses from younger cattle, the kind that is being sought and produced throughout the industry, the breed executive said. At the same time, the proposed revisions make it more difficult for finished cattle in older age brackets to reach preferred market grades, thus encouraging the feeder to market younger cattle.

Henderson explained that by giving more consideration to the kind of younger cattle favored by beef performance-measuring programs, feeders will be able to shorten feeding periods by 20 or more days, eliminating the high cost of laying on undesirable external fats necessary to provide "marbling" required for higher grades. Thus, an estimated 15 percent more cattle can be finished to preferred weights on the same amount of feed.

Shortened feeding periods will reduce finishing costs of live beef with savings on feed, labor and interest costs, and the retailer can eliminate costs now required to trim off and discard the external fats now placed on the animal in order to reach present preferred grading requirements, he added.

Progressive beef industry leaders for many years have described the current grading system as "antiquated" and one that places more emphasis upon older overfat and inefficient cattle than it did for the younger cattle now being produced, and has not kept pace with changes within the industry.

The Charolais proposals would reduce the amount of marbling or tiny flecks of fat within beef tissues on younger slaughter cattle and increase the amount of marbling in older, less tender cattle. Thus, the feeder can finish beef in shorter periods at the trough.

Housewives turn with disfavor upon heavy layers of external fats, which must be trimmed and

discarded by the retailer. Yet the cost of that trimmed waste fat is borne by the consumer in the prices paid for beef.

"She also is reckoning with possible ill effects of high cholesterol levels in overfat beef, giving even more emphasis to the shift to production of quality, young, lean beef," Henderson continued.

"The beef grading system

started as a standard for market reporting. It has been erroneously developed and dictated to the American consumer as a measure of palatability. It is time that the federal government and the beef industry revise this antiquated system to recognize the consumer's preference for tender, lean beef at a reduced cost," Henderson declared.

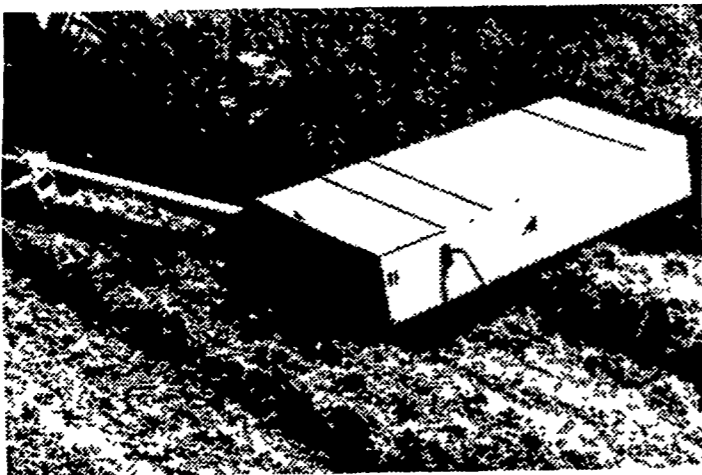
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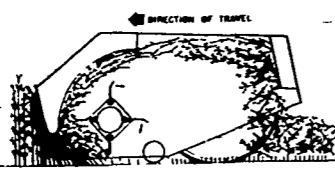
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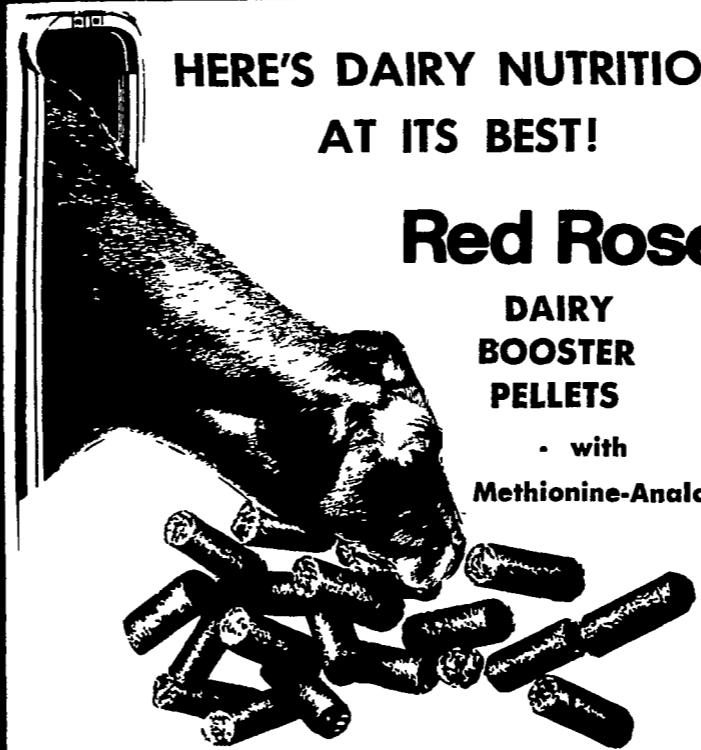
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