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# Beef Grades

[Continued from Page 8]

than in the past. Packers may have to renegotiate customary pricing practices with both their buyers and sellers. They will lose the option of quality grading and-or yield grading. Presently some carcasses with quality grade "highest" tend to yield grade "lowest." Therefore, some packers have found it advantageous to yield grade the 1's, 2's, and 3's but not the 4's and 5's and to identify the Prime and Choice, but not the "lower" grades. This option would no longer be available under the proposed changes. The option to grade or not grade would remain.

**Feeders:** Those feeders who attempt to feed a lot of cattle until a given proportion of the cattle grade Choice may find that this can be done with fewer days on feed using less feed. Feeders may have to give greater consideration to the reduction in cutability of cattle as they are fed to heavier weights. Discounts for "overfat" cattle have occurred in the past mainly when there were a large number of overfat cattle coming to market or when the cattle were extremely and obviously "too fat." Greater attention may also need to be paid to the potential of purchased feeder cattle.

**Producers:** The elimination of conformation from the grade standards does not mean that this factor is not important in selection and breeding. Breeders can concentrate their efforts on musclins

since variation in muscling affects yield grade. Cattle feeders may demand more verifiable information on feedlot performance of calves.

## POSSIBLE CHANGES IN RESOURCE ALLOCATION

The proposed changes have the potential for increasing efficiency of beef production and hence reducing expenditures throughout the market system. They may also result in shifts in resource allocation in cattle raising and finishing.

Live cattle tend to trade on an "average basis." Present prices for slaughter cattle and beef carcasses may not reflect true value differences between individuals. Therefore, feeders may feed cattle longer using more feed and perhaps a different type of cattle than would be the case if the price received reflected differences in fatness.

As a beef animal gains weight in the feedlot each additional pound is composed of less protein and water and more fat. Fat requires more energy than muscle and maintenance requirements increase with weight so feeding becomes progressively more expensive. Most animals also move through the quality grades from Good to Choice to Prime, given enough time and feed. Marbling, conformation, and dressing percentage tend to increase through the feeding period while cutability decreases. The feeding period would

tend to be shorter, other things the same, if there is a price discount associated with decreasing cutability than if there is not. Similarly the decrease in marbling required (for animals of typical "A" maturity) implies that some animals would grade Choice at a lower weight with less marbling under the proposed standards than under the current ones. If the feeder plans to feed to the Choice grade, then less feed will be required.

Lighter weights mean less meat as well as less fat. If the same total amount of meat is to be produced, this

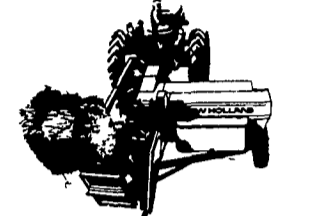
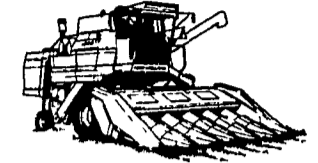
means either more cattle, or cattle of a larger mature size would be needed. Approximately two-thirds of the total feed energy utilized in producing a 1,000-pound slaughter steer is used by the cow and its breeding support, and the calf by the time the calf is weaned. A readjustment in resource use from concentrate feeding toward roughage and breeding resources could ensue.

(The authors are agricultural economists with the USDA's Economic Research Service, stationed at Urbana, Ill.)

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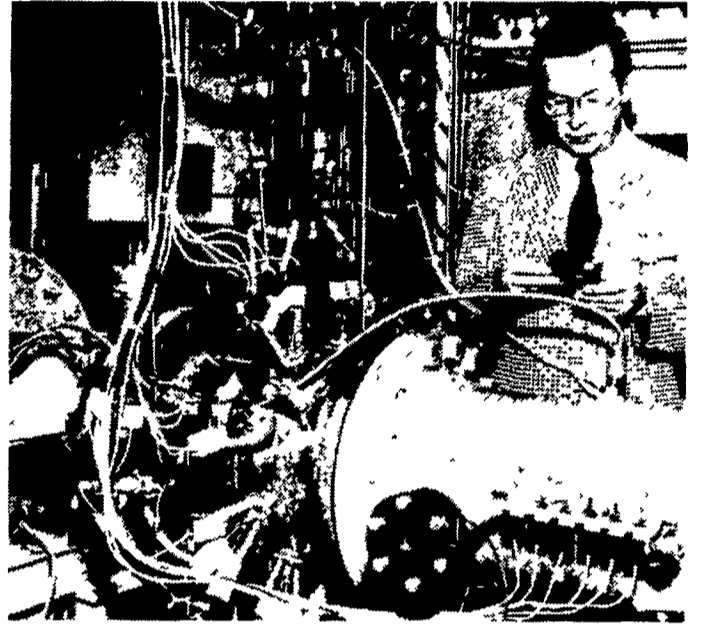
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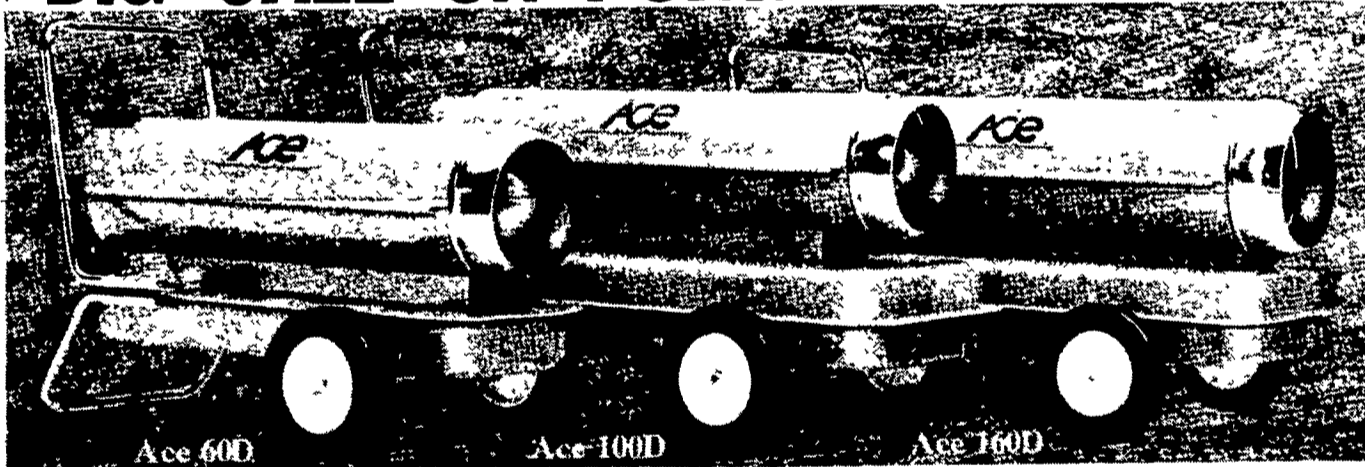
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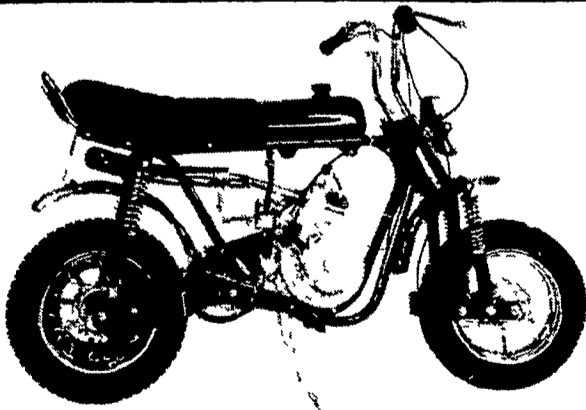
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