

# Eastern Beef Producers Get Extra Bonus From Choice Cattle

COLUMBUS, Ohio — Premiums for Choice beef carcasses have almost doubled nationwide because fewer cattle are grading Choice in the Great Plains, said Brian Roe, Ohio State University Extension livestock economics specialist.

Premiums for Choice carcasses have hit \$10.50 to \$11 above Select - well above the \$5 to \$7 per hundred pounds average premium of the past three years. While this has not had a large effect on the price consumers pay for beef, it is good news for the East and eastern Corn Belt, where beef operations are typically smaller and focus more on quality as a market advantage, Roe said.

"With 1,200- to 1,300-pound animals taken to market, producers could earn \$60 to \$70

more per animal this year than previous years, if they get it to Choice," he said. "For Ohio and other Eastern states, that's an additional marketing opportunity that's typically not there. So while it usually takes a little more time and money to get an animal to grade Choice, this year it probably pays to take those extra steps."

Typical beef prices for Select cattle are in the mid-\$60 to \$70 range per hundred pounds, so adding the \$10.50 to \$11 premium for Choice would increase a producer's earnings by about 15 percent, Roe said.

Over the past three years, about 61 percent of beef carcasses in the East and eastern Corn Belt have gotten a Choice quality grade. In the northern Great Plains, 55 percent of car-

casses have graded Choice, and in Texas and Oklahoma only about 45 percent usually grade Choice.

But from the beginning of April through mid-June of this year, 3.3 percent fewer cattle have been grading Choice in the Great Plains, where most of the nation's beef is produced. A late spring heat wave in the Great Plains likely made it very difficult for animals in that area to reach Choice status. This is a classic case where a regional weather disturbance in one part of the country benefits another region, Roe said.

While the East and Southeast, including Ohio, have actually delivered 2.3 percent more

Choice carcasses than the three-year average from April through mid-June this year, U.S. totals were still down about 2 percent, or about 21,000 carcasses, for the 10-week period.

"The region with Kansas is so big, it dominates the national statistics," Roe said. "In terms of beef production, as that region goes, so go the national averages."

In addition to fewer supplies, an increased demand for higher quality cuts of meat from restaurants and other retail food

outlets also is contributing to the increased Choice premiums, he said.

"If consumer demand continues to be focused on higher quality cuts, and premiums continue to remain high, one wonders how long it will be before producers in the Plains become highly quality conscious and try to compete with the East on quality," Roe said. "If they do successfully implement quality improvements, it may remove one of the East's competitive advantages."

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