

Virginia Cow/Calf Producers Visit Lancaster Feedlots

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Lancaster Farming Staff

Recently a group of about 15 Virginia cow/calf breeders made an educational trip to Lancaster to check out feedlots, question cattle feeders, and investigate retained ownership options. Organized by Virginia livestock extension agents, the day provided a forum for two links in the chain of beef production to exchange information.

The tour included a visit to Karl Hess' operation. Hess has been custom feeding cattle for three years. The group also visited Star Rock Farms which has

a 1,700 head capacity, and Glenn Binkley, who moves a 250 cattle a year. The Nissleys have facilities to handle 1050 head.

"Today they came up to look at retained ownership and custom feeding options," said Wendall Landis, Beef Quality Assurance director and head of the "Blueprint for Success" program.

"Right now most of them are sending to the Plains, but the bigger feedlots in this area have possibilities."

"Another reason is to get information about bulls to change their breeding programs, so that if the cattle don't marble and grade well, they want to get rid of that bull and get one that can do the job," said Landis. "It's important to get the information back to the cow/calf producer, otherwise you're just shooting blanks."

"For Lancaster feeders, retained ownership takes the risk out of it," Landis said. "They might miss out of the highs, but they'll miss out on the disasters too."

One of the questions from the group addressed premiums paid for pre-conditioned cattle.

"If we feed cattle once or twice and look at records for gain and feed conversion, then we'll stretch for that, for the known performance, since it takes the guesswork out of buying the cattle," said Darwin Nissley. He also pointed out that they would be willing to pay more "If we don't have to worry about frame size, or that they won't change colors on the way here."

The group also discussed the option of buying and selling cattle over the InterNet. "To me that's great, we can get an idea what's going on there. It's a nice reference," said Nissley. Because of time constraints, however, the Nissley brothers rely on a cattle broker to buy their cattle.

One of the benefits to retained ownership is information flow, as cattle can be identified and tracked all the way to the slaughterhouse, then grade and yield information goes back to the cow/calf producer. The cattle at the Nissley operation

have an ear tag with a letter to help designate the time the animals were put into the feedlot.

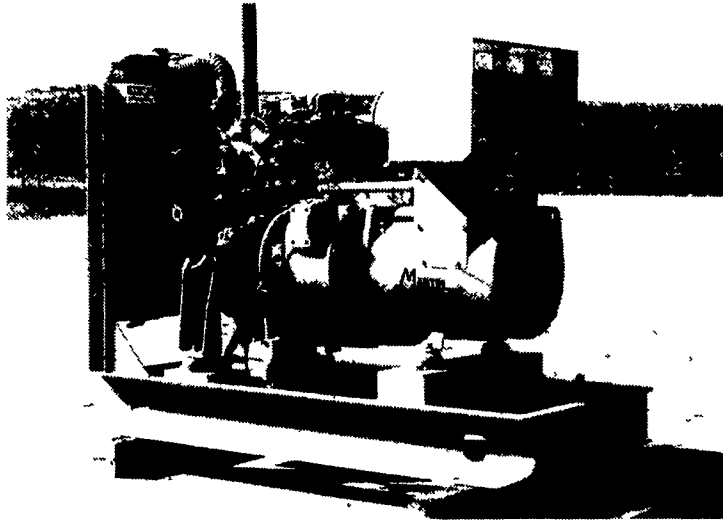
"The tag numbers will tell where the selects and no rolls come from," explained Nissley. "It helps show which cattle are the 'tail-enders' as we call them, the cattle that you could feed for 400 days and they still won't grade choice," said Nissley.

The group from Virginia expressed interest in getting feedback from the feedlots and slaughterhouses, affirming that having that information would help them evaluate their bulls. Knowing how the cattle grade, then, is necessary to make



(left to right, back row) Jim Hogue, from Agri-Basics, Wendall Landis, BQA Director, and cattle feeders Glenn Binkley, and Bernard Nissley helped to host the group from Virginia.

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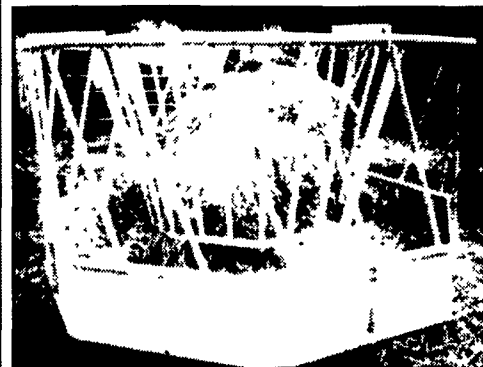
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