

THE TRAILBLAZER

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Researchers Discuss Ways to Update Antiquated Yield Grade Equation

by Colleen Schreiber,
Livestock Weekly, Sept 26, 2024
(reprinted by permission)

DODGE CITY, Kan. — It's long been understood that the current yield grade system is inadequate and antiquated. In fact, it only explains four percent of the variation in red meat yield.

At the recent Feeding Quality Forum, Dr. Dale Woerner, meat scientist at Texas Tech University, discussed this issue and much more. He pointed to a quote from an earlier forum speaker in which the speaker contended there is nothing more valuable



Photo courtesy of Jessica Lancaster Higgins, Ph.D., NCBA

James Henderson, along with other industry partners have put in years of work into attempting to get the Yield Grade to be accurate... maybe they are getting closer to making real change!

than 10 more pounds of hot carcass weight. Woerner contended that the focus needs to be on improving those extra 10 pounds.

"The consist and the composition of those 10 pounds is what's critical," said Woerner.

He also noted that while there isn't a lot of emphasis put on today's yield grading system, there is a very strong relationship between cutout value and red meat yield, the edible component of the carcass. In fact, some data show an 89 percent relationship. What industry is now asking is what does yield grade tell us about that?

To that end, he offered some history about the yield grade equation explaining that it was developed in 1960 using only 162 head of cattle that as Woerner said don't look a thing like the cattle being produced today.

"We're using an antiquated system that's really not telling us enough about red meat yield to correct the market signal that yield grade is giving," he told the group. "Today's market signal is about making cattle heavier."

Consequently, a whole lot more YG 3s, 4s and 5s are being produced today and a whole lot fewer YG 2s.

"What have we done by doing that? What is the true cost of fat?" Woerner asked. "Also, what happens to quality?"

At Texas Tech University, what Woerner and others have focused on of late is trying to understand how to balance marbling genetics and red meat yield. In that effort, they've learned a lot through their work in the beef on dairy space. He shared some of the work in which they took a population of beef on dairy crossbreds, predominantly SimAngus sired genetics and separated them into phenotypic groups. They then tried to understand what they were seeing phenotypically and translate that ultimately to the carcass and red meat yield.

"We figured out that the relationship is not predicted by ribeye area," said Woerner.

Ultimately, those that are tall and narrow gain their weight from skeletal growth, and those that are shorter and thicker gain from muscle and fat within

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that carcass composition. What they didn't find is a relationship that translated rib eye area to true differences in red meat yield.

"This was the first real data that we had indicating that the red meat yield estimation was off," he told the group. "Regardless of the phenotypic groups, there was no statistical or measurable differences in ribeye area."

In fact, researchers have found that ribeye area alone only explains three percent of the total variation in true red meat yield. Also, the relationship between ribeye area and round muscle score is only about 22 percent explained with that ribeye area metric.

Furthermore, Woerner told the group that the data suggest that the current USDA yield grade, as it's computed and calculated today, is only explaining four percent of the total change in red meat yield. Even if improvements were implemented to better understand the relationship of the physiological type, breed type, for example, the accuracy of the yield grade system could only be improved marginally to about 36 percent of the overall variation. Still a failing grade by academic standards, Woerner said.

He looked at still other metrics like the relationship between backfat thickness and red meat yield. That relationship, though much stronger than the relationship of ribeye area, still only explains about 36 percent of the variation.

He also reminded that as hot carcass weight increases so too does fat. In fact, 75 to 80 percent of the transfer from liveweight gain to carcass gain comes in the latter part of the finishing period.

"Understand that 80 to 90 percent of that weight gain in the carcass (in the late feeding period) is fat," said Woerner.

Big picture, he reiterated that there is evidence to indicate that even if the coefficients, ribeye area, fat thickness, hot carcass weight were changed to improve the current yield grade equation, it would only be 63 percent accurate and would only explain about 35 percent of the change in cutout value as it relates to red meat yield.

To improve on the yield grade equation, what Woerner is proposing is using a three-dimensional image that doesn't just measure ribeye area for muscularity but rather would measure the entire conformation of the carcass. That along with artificial intelligence and sophisticated regression techniques and models would be used to "slice the carcass vertebrae by vertebrae" to better understand volume, shape and dimension to get a true measurement of what that carcass is made of.

This common medical technology, a CT scan, would allow the user to directly measure the percentage of bone, fat and muscle in individual carcasses.

"We can utilize this technology along with artificial intelligence to not only redevelop a carcass in a three-dimensional space, but now we can utilize the variation from those CT scans to build carcasses that never existed before," Woerner told the group.

That's important because it will take tens of thousands of carcasses to accurately build a new yield grade equation. He added that using this 3D image technology would shift a four percent variation explained by yield grade into the 90-percentile range.

"Moving forward, we hope, and we expect that we don't just have a market signal that's dedicated to weight gain, but a market signal that's corrected for true, saleable red meat yield while maintaining emphasis on marbling score," said Woerner. "That is the ultimate goal moving forward."

Pushed on when such technology might be available, he told the group that there is an industry group spearheaded by the National Cattlemen's Beef Association looking at exactly that. He acknowledged that while the CT technology is available, only about 100 carcasses can be scanned before a machine is overheated. He further reiterated that what they're hoping with the CT scan is to do enough imaging to develop better, more predictable models for red meat yield.

"My estimation is that we're three to five years out before we actually see these technologies really working in the plant with developed models," said Woerner. "But that's complete speculation."

He noted too that there is technology in development to do this on the live side as well. SizeR is radar wave technology capable of being incorporated into a traditional chute system to get three-dimensional measurement of the center portion of the carcass as the cattle walk through the chute.

"This type of technology may well be the first step for measuring not only terminal cattle but seedstock as well to make better genetic selections and improvements."

Dr. Daniel Clark with Certified Angus Beef followed with some additional comments noting that this type of technology could be used to not only increase yield but ultimately improve feed efficiency, reduce emissions and water loss thereby improve overall sustainability. He also stressed that while it's important to do these things, quality, specifically the importance of taste, can never be forgotten. **3**

See the remainder of the story at www.livestockweekly.com



The **WIDE** Body Sale

The bull sale weekend started Friday afternoon with an educational presentation by Dr. Justin Sexten with Zoetis Precision Animal Health group. His presentation about the importance of data collection and testing of your cow herd for economically important traits. It was well received by all those present.

Saturday was a day of rain showers, but that didn't dampen the spirits of the bidders from a dozen states. When the final gavel fell, 197 Angus bulls sold for an average of \$6,688. The top selling bull was Lot 15 that sold for \$20,000. Lots 7 and 26 Sold for \$19,000, Lot 11 for \$15,000 and Lot 14 for \$14,500 all to repeat Texas buyers.

The Charolais offering of 115 bulls averaged \$5,142. At the top fo the list was Lot 200 selling for \$13,000 while Lot 199 sold for \$10,000 and Lot 274 selling for \$9,500, all to repeat Texas buyers.

Forty-two bred Angus heifers sold to buyers in Texas and Kansas for an average or \$3,468. Thirty-one open Angus heifers sold to buyers in Texas and Mississippi for an average of \$2,107.

In total, cattle went to 12 states ranging from Florida to Idaho and Bradley 3 Ranch enjoyed an exciting day with repeat and new buyers enjoying the fruits of their 66 years in the seedstock business. **3**



TCU Ranch Management Class visits Bradley 3 Ranch

As they started their fall panhandle tour, the TCU Ranch Management class drove in from Fort Worth to spend some time with us here at the ranch.

A fun day was had by all! If you want to know more about the intensive program, reach out to ranch.tcu.edu. **3**



The red-lipped ladies of the 1950's and 2024

For the most part, readers know fashion and proper make up is not one of my talents or real concerns.

All this has changed with my move to the bright lights of Childress. It's the tenth poorest county of the 254 counties in Texas but host to very fashionable ladies. In fact, Childress' downtown main street now houses more beauty parlors than any of the remaining businesses and, those three, a thrift store, a restaurant and insurance are only open at their convenience.

Recently, I noticed a lady leaving one of the beauty parlors in some really worn jeans, the entire knees were in threads, then I saw her mouth was distorted, lips swollen and very red, her hair looked if she had met a mad porcupine as her hair was standing straight up. The thrift store was open so I thought perhaps I could ask her if I might take her shopping for some better jeans and I would be glad to have the beauticians cut and fix her hair, I had to wonder about those very swollen red lips and if she needed to see a doctor. She began walking across the street in a slow gait so I entered the beauty parlor to see if I could learn anything about this poor character. Was she homeless? Had she asked for a donation from patrons in the parlor? I got set immediately back on my heels when I was told she was the most fashionable lady in town. I asked if they were mistaken on the lady in question but, was assured that lady was the fashion show window in Childress.

Had I really been out in the brush too long to realize my appearance in the late 1950's mirrored

Tales from Minnie Lou— or as friends say “you just can’t make this up!”



by Minnie Lou Bradley

the lady of such supposed fashion in 2024? My fashion came from different sources than hers. I had no beauty shop to stand my hair on its ends, no certified person to swell and color my lips and no machine to shred my jeans! But I was provided with a lot more adventure and less cash outlay for all of that! Somehow, however, the fashion selectors in Childress had missed my fashionable style of jeans, lips and hair and would often mistake me at the cash register, as a wet-back! They never questioned if I was homeless, in the country town of cotton and cattle!

For the first time I will share my secrets of my now very fashionable secrets of looking like the lady of the 2024! Unlike the one stop shop for all the beauty changes in an air-conditioned building, some 69 years ago, my beauty changes were formed in the open air with sunshine and, sometime under the stars. To begin with, my shredded jeans came from two one-ton bulls fighting over a fence. When they got tired and walked away, I began to try untangling the barbed wire where my britches were soon shredded. Little did I know then, they would be worth more today, than the creased starched Levi's that I was so proud to wear.

With shredded britches, that called for a hairdo which came rather unexpected. Missing a cow heavy with calf, I left the pickup to walk up a draw in the middle of a brushy pasture. The sunflowers were way over my head when I saw the eyes of 77. Those eyes told me



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all I needed to know, and that was to turn tail and try to get out of there, she and I had had a previous encounter and I vividly remember who won! I saw daylight and headed for it but then I hit cockle burrs and going through made my hair looked much like the fashionable lady's hairdo of the 2024, a street-stopper! Perhaps unknowingly old 77 and I had had hit a homerun for styling of hair!

It was an early spring morning when Bill, a young college girl from Michigan, and an unexperienced teen age boy and I penned 100 cows purchased in east Texas and was told they would need a good worming once settled into our short grass country. Each would need to be drenched with the worm killer, phenothiazine, a gray thick liquid. Bill was to catch the cow in the very old chute with the long pipe handle that had a habit of knocking a fellow to the ground. The young man, greener than a gourd, was to run the back gate and, our college girl was to push into the chute, so I was left with the grabbing and turning the cows head up while pushing down on the drench gun. I was wearing leather gloves to try and prevent heavy bruising to my hands. Not long into the drenching, a small northern blew in and it got rather cool, and I had to wipe my nose quite often. We got through the 100 head and the young lady, and I got on horseback and returned the cows to a two-section pasture. It was about a mile drive and not long into the drive, against the north wind, my nose to my chin started to burn. Knowing my helper carried lip balm I hollered across the herd to borrow some. When she rode close enough, she pitched it to me, and I remember how good it felt, I used the entire tube!

We got the cows to their home pasture where Munzie (the young college girl) shut the gate, got back in saddle, took one look at me and went into hysterical laughter. What was so funny is that was lipstick not balm! The red lipstick had penetrated two layers of my skin from the burning wormer and there was no removing of the color!

I became the town's clown, people would holler at me, wondering if I had missed the bus, saying "the circus left town last month!"

I have to wonder what the so-called fashionable ladies of today, sitting in a parlor for their makeover, would think if they knew ole '77 and a thousand like her, are the reasons there are age-defying ointments being applied and that they come from their brain while the red lips originates from their fat. **3**

On The Road Again.



Come see us at these Ranch Rodeo Trade Shows & Cattle Events

November 14 - 17 – WRCA Ranch Rodeo Finals

Civic Center, downtown Amarillo, Texas

Come by the booth and visit and while you are there sign up to win the Vaccine Cooler.



Our lucky winner for the cooler we gave away at the Ranch Rodeo in Wichita Falls, Texas!

December 11 - 13 – New Mexico Cattle Growers Association

Annual Convention at

Hotel Albuquerque Old Town

Albuquerque, New Mexico

February 4-6, 2025 – National Cattlemen Beef Association

Annual Convention, San Antonio, Texas

February 7, 2025 – You're invited to look at our sale cattle at the ranch!

February 8, 2025 – Annual Bull and Female sale at the ranch. Estelline, Texas

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