

One of the biggest costs that a cattle producer incurs each year is the cost to feed his/her cattle. Many producers recognize this and work to reduce their feed costs as much as possible- sometimes going so far as to prevent the cattle from meeting their nutritional requirements. Though this may seem effective in some operations, we believe there is an easier, more adequate method of reducing feed costs in a manner that will yield desired results both now, and years down the road. This week we will continue our discussion about feed efficiency and discuss how selection for this trait will have a positive impact on your operation.

The feed efficiency of an animal can be measured by assessing its residual feed intake, or RFI. Crozier and ZoBell, 2010, describe RFI as “the feed required to maintain body weight and allow for additional growth.” That is, it is the difference between what the anticipated feed intake of the animal is, and what the animal actually consumes. Selection for low RFI (efficient) cattle is worthwhile, as it results in reduced feed costs over time because feed efficient cattle require less feed compared to others in order to meet their requirements. Some producers may be concerned that selection for low RFI cattle will alter the body size of the cattle in the herd, but this is not the case. In fact, studies show that selection for low RFI cattle has no negative effects on the growth or size of the animal. Further, though the cattle consume less compare to others, feed efficient cattle perform just as well, and hold their own against market standards and conditions.

Regardless of your type of cattle operation, feed efficiency can be selected for and implemented in a way that will improve the overall operation efficiency and productivity. For producers that have replacement females it can be used as a selection tool to guide the producer in making culling decisions. Heifers with the best feed efficiency, in conjunction with other desired traits, may be retained over heifers with poor feed efficiency. It has been shown that efficient calves become efficient adults, who, in turn, have efficient progeny. By selecting for feed efficient females you are also increasing the future feed efficiency of your complete herd. The same can be said of bulls that are proven to be feed efficient. Because feed efficiency is hereditary, using feed efficient bulls on your herd will make a lasting impact on the overall efficiency.

No one knows exactly what feed prices will do in the months and years to come. The best way to prepare for this unknown is by producing feed efficient cattle. We encourage you to use the resources available to determine which cattle in your herd are causing unnecessary expense by being inefficient. Then, introduce more feed efficient genetics in the herd. This will result in more productive cattle, which in turn, creates a more profitable and efficient operation for the producer. To read more on Crozier and ZoBell's article regarding RFI as a tool for selection, visit:

https://extension.usu.edu/files/publications/publication/AG_Beef_2010-01.pdf

Prices for feeder steers medium and large 1 sold through the Oklahoma National Stockyards on Monday, December 8, 2014, are as follows: 461lb- \$330.99, 570lb- \$285.30, 672lb- \$254.66, and 763lb- \$234.13. The price for January 2015 750lb feeder steers on the Chicago Mercantile Exchange was \$232.075 on closing Monday, December 8, 2014.

Thanks,
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