



Temperament Affects Profitability

by **Brooke Byrd**

Feed efficiencies are poorer and mortality rates are higher for aggressive calves compared to more docile calves.

DENVER, CO (Feb. 1, 2006) — During Wednesday's Cattlemen's College®, Darrell Busby from Iowa State University shared research gleaned through studying the Tri-County Steer Carcass Futurity (TCSCF).

The goal of the TCSCF, Busby noted, is to figure out which steers are the most profitable. And there are differences. During the last five years, 24,315 steers and heifers have been entered into the TCSCF from producers in 12 states. In 2004-2005, with 3,132 steers, the top one-third of the cattle gained a profit of \$225.26, while the lowest one-third lost \$46.46.

Cattle disposition and handling can have a huge effect on cattle performance and carcass quality, Busby said.

"What is disposition? It's a measure of how tame and docile cattle are," Busby explained. "How does disposition affect health? Excitable animals compromise their own safety."

Using a scoring system developed by the Beef Improvement Federation (BIF), TCSCF cattle are scored on a scale of 1 to 6:

- 1. Docile.** No tail ringing, no elevated respiration
- 2. Restless.** Slight tail ringing,

slight elevated respiration, but calm down quickly

- 3. Nervous.** More movement, rapid entry and exit, but calm down quickly
- 4. Flighty.** Jumpy cattle, run instead of walking, warily watch
- 5. Aggressive.** Struggle, run into gates and walls, heads up
- 6. Very aggressive or "killers."** Same as 5, but will attack humans

Cattle are scored three to four times: on test (after letting cattle get accustomed to surroundings), at time of implant and at harvest.

Busby said that many conclusions can be drawn from TCSCF disposition information. "Feed efficiencies are poorer on the aggressive calves," he said. While morbidity rates are higher on docile calves (scores 1 and 2; perhaps because aggressive calves don't show depression and hide illness), mortality was almost twice as high in aggressive calves (scores 5 and 6) compared to docile calves.

More excitable cattle were also less tender and tended more toward being borderline dark cutters. TCSCF data also showed that wild cattle shrunk 23.5 pounds (lb.) vs. only 1.3 lb. for docile cattle.

Compared to docile cattle, feedlot gain was reduced by 8.2% in aggressive cattle, Busby said. And the number of cattle grading USDA Choice or higher was reduced by 15.9%.

Genetic selection and proper handling are the keys to improving cattle temperament, Busby said. With a heritability factor of 0.40, “selection will improve temperament,” he noted.

When it comes to cattle

handling, “handlers are a bigger factor than the equipment,” he cautioned. “Patience is something that’s very critical.”

However, he said, producers should design facilities for handling cattle effectively by reducing sound, sharp shadows and distractions. Ultimately, Busby emphasized, learning more about cattle and their habits and instincts can reduce injuries and offer benefit.



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