

FACTORS INFLUENCING THE PRICE OF FEEDER CATTLE

According to data from Utah Agricultural Statistics, Cache County now has more beef cows than dairy cows. Of all local agricultural enterprises, however, dairy production still makes the greatest single contribution to the \$134.5 million annual infusion of direct cash receipts from Cache County farms and ranches.

The typical Cache County beef producer has a relatively small herd of cows, on limited acreage, and works a full time job off the farm. There is freedom to come and go as needed, though some seasons of the year (such as calving time) are very busy for beef producers. Most local dairy farmers manage milk cows full- time, including weekends and holidays.

Cow/calf beef producers usually get paid only once a year, when feeder calves are sold. A milk check comes to dairy producers every two weeks, though those checks have been rather small this past year.

I was interested in reviewing a North Dakota State University Beef Cattle and Range Research Report, forwarded to our local Extension office last week. Results of this study may prove helpful to local beef ranchers who are anxious to maximize their profits when selling feeder calves.

The objective of this study was to determine factors influencing the sale price of feeder calves from North Dakota, South Dakota and Montana auction markets. Data were collected at three auction markets in North Dakota and two auction markets each in South Dakota and Montana in fall 2007. The same process was followed during winter 2008. Data were collected during the same weeks in each state to reduce confounding effects of fluctuations in market patterns.

The following data were collected for each lot of calves sold: lot size, sex, weight, breed description, vaccination history, implant status and natural program qualification. A total of 59,855 calves, averaging 531 pounds were tracked in the fall of 2007(three sales per market). 39,454 calves averaging 625 pounds were analyzed during winter 2008 (three sales per market).

In the fall, producers who sold calves in lot sizes of 21 or more head received greater prices when compared with producers who sold calves in lots of 20 or fewer head. Calves sold in lot sizes of 11 to 20 were priced greater than calves sold in lot sizes of 10 or fewer. Lot sizes of six to 10 received greater prices than lot sizes of five or fewer head.

The price for steers was \$9.68/hundredweight (cwt) greater than for heifers. The price for black cattle was greater than prices received for mixed-color groups, red or white cattle. Mixed color and red cattle were priced similarly; however, mixed color cattle tended to sell for greater prices than white cattle. Red and white cattle were priced similarly.

Calves sold with a seven way clostridial, four-way viral and Pasteurella vaccines were priced greater than calves vaccinated with a four-way viral vaccine only, or no vaccination history. Price received for calves vaccinated with a four-way viral vaccine was greater than calves with no vaccination history. No differences in price were observed for implant status or natural program-qualified calves.

In winter sales, the price received for lot sizes of 21 or more and 11 to 20 were priced similarly but were greater than lots of 10 or fewer head. Lot sizes of six to 10 were priced greater than lots of five or fewer head.

The price for steers was \$8.99/cwt greater than heifers. The price for black cattle was greater than all other colors of cattle. Mixed and red cattle were priced similarly but greater than white cattle.

Vaccinated calves brought a greater price than calves with no vaccination history. No differences in price were observed for implant status or natural program qualified calves.

Data suggest feeder calf price is dependent on multiple factors. Selling black calves in larger lot sizes with vaccinations proved to be economically advantageous.