

## **The Need for Meaningful Carcass Data**

"Carcass data is great, but what do I do with it?" This question is not asked often enough.

Seedstock producers will use the data to develop more accurate EPDs, but many commercial ranchers may struggle with the value of detailed data. Besides, it usually comes at a price and you typically won't receive the information unless you sell on a grid. Cash-sold cattle don't typically receive carcass data from the animals.

Also, it is not enough to have just quality grade and yield grade data. It's better than nothing, but it sorely lacks the kind of meaningful information that one can take back home and evaluate to make genetic decisions.

Sometimes it might seem to be a daunting task to get any data at all! But, here's what you really need:

1. Tag transfer: In other words, matching the ranch tag to the correct individual data. If you can't trace data back to the sire and dam, you can't find out how those individuals are stacking up. This will allow you to make changes that are needed to improve your overall genetic decisions.
2. Hot carcass weight: HCW, when divided by the live shrunk weight, gives you dressing percentage. Cattle sold on the grid are sold on the HCW basis.
3. Ribeye area (in square inches): REA is important because it is calculated into the Yield Grade formula. A larger ribeye area indicates a heavier muscled animal, and typically contributes to a lower numerical Yield Grade.
4. Fat cover (in tenths and usually hundredths of inches, e.g. 0.45"): Contributes heavily towards Yield Grade.
5. Marbling scores: For instance, Slight, Small, Modest, Moderate and Slightly Abundant are all examples of Marbling scores. Sometimes a numerical score is used such as 400 for Small (which equals Low Choice) or 500 (which equates to Modest 0, or middle Choice).
6. Quality grade: Prime, Choice, Select and Standard are all examples of quality grades. If there are branded beef programs that carcasses might qualify for, that information will usually be included as well.
7. Yield grade: Simply, 1,2,3 4 or 5 are the numerical yield grades. 1= lean while 4 and 5 are overly fat. A Yield Grade of 3 is average.

Collect as much information as possible. The packer knows more about your cattle than you do. It pays dividends to know these critical components of your cattle's carcasses!