Northern NY Agricultural Development Program
2007-2008 Project Report

Improving Beef Carcass Quality/Consistency Using Ultrasound

Project Leader
Jessica Prosper, CCE Franklin; jlr15@cornell.edu

Collaborators
Bernadette Logozar, Franklin County bel7@cornell.edu
Michele Ledoux, Lewis County mel14@cornell.edu
Anita Deming , Essex County ald6@cornell.edu
Blake Putman, Clinton County blp26@cornell.edu
Brent Buchanan, St. Lawrence County bab22@cornell.edu
Ron Kuck, Jefferson County rak76@cornell.edu
Mike Baker, Beef Cattle Extension Specialist mjb28@cornell.edu
Heather Birdsall, CCE Cortland County, hhb6@cornell.edu

Cooperating Producers
Clinton County: Penny Pombrio, Corbiau Creek Angus Farm, Altona, NY
Franklin County: Hugh and Ginette Stark, Double T Ranch, Malone, NY
Jefferson County: Lloyd Garnsey, Clayton, NY

Background
According to the New York Agricultural Statistics 2006-2007 Annual Bulletin, there are currently 13,200 Beef Cattle being raised on farms in the six northern NY counties. Many of these are small, part-time operations where farmers often lack important knowledge in regards to grading their animals and carcass composition. Such information is essential for the efficient production of lean, consistent beef that consumers demand in today's market.

There has been an expressed need by farmers and producers in the region to work toward raising animals of more consistent quality, both for local and conventional markets.

Farmers who can accurately grade their animals on the farm because of their knowledge and understanding of carcass composition will be able to more effectively market their animals in a variety of market channels resulting in a more profitable business.

Methods
Beef animals in three central locations in counties across the region were analyzed through the use of ultrasound to measure the percentage of fat and the amount of marbling in the animals. This provided a reliable estimate of live animal composition, which showed the participants how animals differed according to their breeds, ages, and management practices. Knowing this information will assist farmers in gauging when their animals have reached their "optimal" sale weight and carcass composition.

The second portion of the program was more academic and involved a presentation on meat quality. This included such things as meat quality factors, factors that affect meat quality, and how the USDA grading system works.

Conclusions/Outcomes/Impacts

The outcome/impact of this project was that the participants were able to gain a better understanding of meat quality and how it is impacted by both environmental and genetic factors. Participants were also educated on the use of ultrasound on beef operations. This was the first time that most of the participants had seen ultrasound used in this manner. Upon reviewing the evaluations, most of the participants learned a lot from the demonstration and the presentation. Most left with better understanding of how the information could be used to improve some of the practices on their farms, including choosing better replacement animals, grading, and finishing their animals.

Outreach

Farmers were informed of the project prior to the workshops through several avenues. These included articles and notices in county Cooperative Extension Ag news publications and by Kara Lynn Dunn in various agricultural publications. Following the workshops, articles were published in county publications as well as an article in the Watertown Daily Times that can be found at: http://www.watertowndailytimes.com/article/20080917/NEWS03/309179943.

Participants in the workshop were also able to bring information away from the program in the form of a folder of information that was compiled to reinforce what was learned while attending the workshop.

Next steps

Because this was the first time many of the beef producers in the area were introduced to ultrasound, we feel that the next step in this educational process should be to give beef producers the opportunity to actually have their own animals ultrasounded and have the images analyzed and interpreted by an Ultrasound Processing Lab. After the results are received, we would then follow up with how the results are applied and used in regards to culling animals and bull selection in order to result in shifting the herd to producing a more consistent product.

Acknowledgments: Funded solely by NNYADP

For more information

Mike Baker
Cornell Beef Cattle Extension Specialist
Cornell University
114 Morrison Hall
Ithaca, NY 14853

Jessica Prosper
Franklin County Cooperative Extension
355 West Main Street, Malone, NY 12953
518-483-7540