

Developing Genetics for an Elite Herd

The largest sum of cash ever awarded in a beef value contest, totaling \$244,500, was given at the Best of the Breed Angus Challenge in 2003. John Brethour of Kansas State University, a pioneer in the development of carcass ultrasound, was awarded first price worth \$100,000 for his entry of 80 steers. His championship entry consisted of 100% Choice, 91% Certified Angus Beef or better, and 32% Prime with no Yield Grade 4 carcasses (over-fat) and 31% Yield Grade 2 (~7-14mm backfat).

What makes this contest especially challenging, is that candidates were selected and placed on feed at least 100 days prior to harvest. "Approximately 280 steers were evaluated (with ultrasound) in order to find the 80 candidates," says John Brethour. "Our herd is about 60% Angus and we've worked with sire testing and ultrasound evaluations since 1989. Over the years we had relied on the expected progeny difference (EPD) data in sale books to build carcass merit in our commercial cow herd. We felt we were making progress, but this contest provided an opportunity to objectively measure how far we had come and proves that relying heavily on EPD'S for selection works. At least eight of the top finalists in the contest consisted of cattle selected with ultrasound technology before they were enrolled. All of our seedstock suppliers have used ultrasound for improving carcass genetics for years."

At Windy Ridge Ultrasound Inc, we have been providing ultrasound services to cattle producers for over 14 years. It has been exciting to see the genetic progress different producers have made over the years. Our own bulls and heifers measured 84% AAA or better this year. It is our hope to continue providing producers with the tools they need to develop an elite herd of cattle. With premiums being paid for quality beef, it is in our interest as beef producers to develop a herd of cattle that can be marketed for top dollar.

Upon investing money into herd improvement, it is essential to market this information to your customers and potential customers. No matter what breed of cattle you raise, there are distinct traits and characteristics that can continue to be developed through the years. It is in our best interest to learn all we can about our herds, work to improve the genetics, and then market these improvements the best we can.

By Chase Wendorff