WHY THE SOUTH AFRICAN MEAT CLASSIFICATION SYSTEM NEEDS TO CHANGE

The "Quantity of Beef" profit driver is completely ignored.

There are two 'material' profit drivers in the production of beef in South Africa.

1. QUALITY OF BEEF PRODUCED

This relates to the amount of fat cover over the meat and the producer is rewarded for this in the current classification system. Research is currently underway to enhance the classification system to reward marbling.

This is a very important profit driver as it determines taste of the meat. In addition we are trying to develop our export markets to compete with other countries globally.

2. QUANTITY OF BEEF PRODUCED

This important profit driver is completely ignored in the current classification system and there is no incentive for the producer to produce beef with a more muscular animal.

If one goes to the "Ask the Meat Man" website with the following link http://askthemeatman.com/yield_on_beef_carcass.htm#breakdown you will find the results of their numerous tests where they have cut up and measured carcasses in the U.S.A. for over 50 years. The results are quite amazing!

If one compares the yield of saleable meat (the proportion of the carcase that can be processed and sold to the customer) from a lean, bulky, beefy and well-muscled carcase to the yield from a flat, low muscled and very fat carcase, it is a massive 35% differential.

This is mainly due to huge amounts of fat and bone being produced, which is wastage.

Yield from a lean, choice 300lb side = bulky, well-muscled, low fat carcase:
Fat & bone (waste) = 15%
Usable meat cuts (take-home meat) = 85%
(85 ÷ 85 = 100%)

Yield from an average, choice 300lb side = medium muscled, fat carcase:
Fat & bone (waste) = 30%
Usable meat cuts (take-home meat) = 70%
(70 ÷ 85 = 82.5%)

Yield from a very fat, choice 300lb side = low muscle, flat, very fat carcase:
Fat & bone (waste) = 45%
Usable meat cuts (take-home meat) = 55%
(55 ÷ 85 = 65%)

There is a 35% (100% - 65%) differential in saleable meat between a lean, bulky, well-muscled carcase with low fat and that of a flat, low-muscled and very fat carcase.

Some sides of beef are fatter than other sides of beef. Because excess fat is removed during cutting, carcase fatness will affect how much take-home meat a side of beef will yield.

The amount of fat and bone that must be trimmed (cutting loss) from a side has an influence on the "quantity" of saleable meat produced.

I have spoken to numerous other influential beef industry role-players, namely Dr Michael Bradfield, Professor Frikkie Neser and Dr Phillip Strydom; and they all agree that this profit driver needs to be addressed for the benefit of the industry and the beef breeds that produce much more beef naturally.

We live in South Africa; an emerging market country; with lots of poverty… Not like the first world countries Australia and the U.S.A. We are trying to feed a nation and to produce more beef sustainably and cost-effectively, and yet this important profit driver is just ignored in South Africa.

As a beef industry we need to transform ourselves and understand that we are not only trying to improve the 'quality' of our beef so we can compete with the global export markets, but we are also trying to feed our nation with large quantities of affordable beef.

More "muscular" weaner calves sought after by the Feedlots and Meat Processors

FEEDLOTS AND MEAT PROCESSORS – WANT THE 'QUANTITY' PROFIT DRIVER

It is common knowledge that feedlots discriminate against a few of our indigenous breeds – they discriminate and pay lower rates per kilogram. This problem can be solved by using the correct breed of bull and crossing it with these indigenous breeds to create a muscular slaughter animal.

We need to encourage breeding with the right animals that feed and convert grass & grain effectively with good average daily gains and feed conversion ratios. These animals will finish with the right amount of fat cover (even if fed for longer). It costs the same to process a small carcase versus a large carcase.

In addition, feedlots and meat processors want animals with high slaughter percentages, excellent retail beef yields, eye muscle areas and good conformation.

A POSSIBLE, SIMPLE SOLUTION TO THIS PROBLEM

Our classification system does have a conformation score of 1 – 5. It relates to the 'quantity profit driver'.

Without costing the industry a cent more, at slaughter a flat, low-muscled carcase with a conformation score of a 1 & 2 should be penalised, and a round, bulky, beefy carcase of 4 – 5 should be rewarded extra. This would immediately give an incentive to the cattle producers to farm with the correct breed of animal.

How does one determine the reward/penalty? Assume the carcase weight price is R50 per kilogram. Take 10% - it's easy to understand and work out.

For example:
Conformation score 1 – R5.00 (penalise)
Conformation score 2 – R2.50 (penalise)
Conformation score 4 + R2.50 (reward)
Conformation score 5 + R5.00 (reward)

As one can see, this does not cost the industry a cent more and is easy to implement.

The large feedlots and meat processors (the same businesses) would also benefit enormously from this change as they would automatically get more of the right type of animals in their feedlots which would feed and convert maize and grass into meat more efficiently… We compete against an effective, advanced chicken industry. In addition they would get higher slaughter percentages. Finally they would add large quantities of saleable meat when they cut the meat off the bone, add more profit to their bottom line and feed our nation cost effectively.

Even with a 'disconnect' between when a weaner is purchased and finally slaughtered, this change in the classification system would encourage the producers and the feedlot buyers to procure these efficient, beefy calves.

CONCLUSION

We need to transform our industry to address the problem of poverty so that we can feed our nation and produce more beef sustainably and cost-effectively by using the right breed of bull. There is a massive 35% differential between a lean, bulky, well-muscled, efficient carcase and a very fat, low muscled, flat carcase. For this reason the classification system needs to change to encourage and give producers an incentive to produce more "quantity of beef" naturally, so that all the 'role players' in the industry and the South African consumer can benefit.

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