

LESS FEED, LESS MONEY

From labor to health, Blasi says limit-feeding has benefits.

by Miranda Reiman, Certified Angus Beef LLC

When it comes to stocker nutrition, an old-fashioned strategy might be the way of the future. That's what Dale Blasi, Kansas State University (K-State) Extension beef specialist, said about limit-feeding calves in the growing phase.

The scientific research goes back decades, but at this year's 13th annual Feeding Quality Forum in Sioux City, Iowa, Blasi presented new reasons to give it a fresh look.

► **Eat less, gain the same.** "Can we simplify what we're doing?" Blasi asked. Going from an "all-you-can-eat Vegas buffet" to a "Camp Pendleton diet" didn't significantly affect average daily gain (ADG), but it did improve feed efficiency by 27%.

► **Less input = less output.** When cattle consume less, waste decreases, too. A 45% reduction in fecal output, from 8.28 pounds (lb.) per animal to 4.59 lb., equates to saving a nickel each day for manure removal, Blasi shared. "Over 100 days, that's \$5 per animal savings at the stocker unit." He suggested producers figure that cost for their own operation.

► **Delivery dollars.** Early research points to shaving off truckloads in feed delivery because of higher-density rations, Blasi said. "You save your truck driver. You save your equipment wear and tear. You have to take that type of stuff into consideration."

► **Better health detection.** "When it is time to eat your breakfast at Camp Pendleton, you are going to eat," he said. "From a health-detection

perspective, that driver can do an incredible service looking for the cattle that are not very interested in wanting to eat." There is no way to put a dollar value on that, but it's an important benefit.

A little more starch

Increasing energy in the form of starchy ingredients, such as grain, "gives us some caution," said Blasi, noting increased health challenges and death losses as concerns. That's where limiting the amount comes in.

At K-State's stocker unit, cattle are offered long-stem grass hay on arrival. The next day they get a total mixed ration (TMR) of 40% byproducts (wet distillers' grain or wet corn gluten feed) and 38% corn fed at 1% of bodyweight. It's stepped up by 0.25% of body weight until Day 5. That cuts the time to full ration (2.25% of body weight) by more than half the normal warm-up period.

Blasi said it's a good strategy to consider when drought dramatically increases forage costs.

"Not just anybody can step out

there and decide they can do it tomorrow. You have to be dedicated to the process," he cautioned. Requirements include precise in-weights and allowing at least 15 inches per head of bunk space. Throughout the process, it's important to have an accurate head count in the pens after pulls.

"You need to know exactly what you've got," Blasi said, especially since most producers won't weigh

Other benefits that are hard to quantify include health detection, fewer machine hours and reduced days to a finishing stage.

"If I were to hire a student feeding once per day as opposed to two times per day, that adds another \$2,700 over that 90-day turn," Blasi said.

In past studies, "there's no indication of limit-feeding [in the growing phase] having a negative



For 100 head during a three-month growing phase, better efficiency translates to a \$1,600 feed savings, K-State's Dale Blasi shared with attendees of the 2018 Feeding Quality Forum in Sioux City, Iowa. There's another \$500 savings in manure removal reduction. All of that adds up to \$21 per head.

cattle every two weeks like they do in research studies. "As long as you have a good, accurate starting weight, and a uniform set of calves, you can just calculate gains as you bump your ration amounts up. You have to be on your 'A' game."

Significant savings

Done right, limit-feeding can have a significant economic impact. For 100 head during a three-month growing phase, better efficiency translates to a \$1,600 feed savings. There's another \$500 savings in manure removal reduction. All of that adds up to \$21 per head.

impact on the finish-feeding performance."

His team is following the cattle all the way through harvest to study impact on carcass quality.

"It's kind of like something that's been in vogue for so long, loses its coolness, and then along the way you say, 'Why haven't we been staying with that?'"



Editor's note: Miranda Reiman is director of producer communications for Certified Angus Beef LLC. CAB's 2018 Feeding Quality Forum was cosponsored by Where Food Comes From, Roto-Mix, Feedlot Magazine, Tyson Foods, Intellibond, Zoetis and Diamond V. For more information, including meeting proceedings, visit www.feedingqualityforum.com.