



CATTLE PERFORMANCE ENHANCEMENT COMPANY

# The Sortin' Stick

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## THE CPEC ULTRASOUND TOOL

Over the last year or so, several beef cattle publications have penned articles in regard to ultrasound and its use in beef cattle production. Most of these articles have centered their discussion on the fact that ultrasound has become the accepted tool in the development of EPD's for the seedstock industry. In the same breath they report that "using ultrasound technology in the feedlot side of the business is just beginning to catch on. The reason is simple: *Show Me the Money!*"

In 1994, the owners of CPEC (John Brethour, Dr. Wade Taylor & Dr. Tom Noffsinger) persuaded John and Kansas State University to acquire a patent for John's Feedlot Sorting Software. Since that time, CPEC has been the sole distributor of the software program to feedlots, veterinarians, universities, independent technicians, beef research centers and 1 beef marketing business. Since the first system was installed back in 1994, some 2 million cattle have been ultrasounded and sorted using this patented system. Now, to say this technology is "just beginning to catch on" would cause me to wonder where these publications have been acquiring their information.

The business of sorting feedlot cattle into marketing groups based upon their carcass characteristics, at re-implant time, is ALL ABOUT THE MONEY! Don't let anyone in the industry tell you otherwise. It's about placing like animals into a marketing group and then managing that group to its most optimum outcome. Now, how hard can that be.





Early on in John's research, he discovered that sorting cattle into their respective marketing groups was worth \$10 to \$15 per head. Knowing when to market that group was worth another \$10 per head, minimum. Sorting into at least three marketing groups accomplished several beef marketing and feeding efficiencies.

- Nearly eliminates outliers by sorting for optimum outcome
- Increases days on feed for slower marbling cattle
- Decreases days on feed for faster marbling cattle
- Maximizes carcass gain on all cattle

A case in point comes from a research project done by Clement Ward, Dept of Ag Economics at Oklahoma State University. In this project he had the following pen of finished cattle:

186 steers on feed 147 days, ADG-3.8, Feed Conversion-6.9, Live Wt-1419, Carcass Wt-883, sold on a Choice YG 3 price of \$118.00.

There were 6.2% Prime, 24.9% CAB, 46.5% Choice, 21% Select & .7% Standards. The cattle contained 1.5% YG1's, 33.2% YG2's, 61.2% YG3's, 3.6% YG4's, .5% YG5's & 7.3% carcasses over 950 lbs. Based on these kill sheet results, the cattle brought back \$115.42 per hundred wt.

By sorting, the first discount he could eliminate were the 7.3% heavy carcasses, resulting in a carcass price of \$116.88 or an increase in pen revenue of \$2397. Just by eliminating the heavies increased the carcass pricing by over a dollar per hundred.

The next improvement from sorting came from the elimination of the YG 4 & 5 carcasses. By decreasing the days on feed for these animals so they killed as YG 3 carcasses, increased the carcass pricing over \$2 to \$117.50 or \$3421 for the pen.

The final advantage from sorting came from adding more days on feed to the Standard cattle thus increasing the percentage of Select and Choice cattle in the pen. The result increased the final carcass pricing to \$118.69 or a pen revenue increase of \$5381. That is an increase of \$3.27 per hundred wt or \$28.87 per head, just by eliminating the discounts. These results support John Brethour's premise that sorting is worth at least an extra \$25 per head.



Recently, I had the opportunity to visit with one of our ultrasound clients who was excited with the results from sorting in their feedyard. It seems they have progressed to the point with their sorting program that all sorts have almost identical kill results at the plant. That means each delivery has live finish weights in the 1350 lb range, with a large majority of YG 3 carcasses, minimum YG 4's, no heavies and very few if any Standard's. In this situation, the customer wanted to make sure the carcass weight was there without the discounts. Quality grade was not a big issue at this time, but they know how to sort cattle to take advantage of the Choice-Select spread when it does increase.

With the advent of DNA, testing incoming feeder cattle to determine their feeding and packing plant performance is possible. The DNA is giving the feeder an idea of what to expect from a set of feeder cattle. However, some limited experience in this field tells us that even though the DNA tells one thing, the actual performance of the cattle can be something else. It seems that environment along with health and nutritional upsets have a huge influence on the actual performance of the cattle. This is the point where the re-implant ultrasound scan can deliver the true picture of how the animal is progressing towards their individual feeding endpoint. All in all, DNA testing gives us a roadmap, ultrasound tells us if the journey is going as planned and gives the feeder time to make management adjusts.

Not only are feedyards using the CPEC Sorting Software to make management decisions in marketing their fed cattle, universities are using the software program for research in evaluating cattle feeding programs. Even packing plants have discovered the advantage of having cattle sorted based upon their individual carcass characteristics, before they reach the plant. It makes their job of processing and marketing our fed cattle to the potential customer, easier.

Just because only the more progressive feeders are using a sorting program, does not implicate the "technology is just now catching on". It only proves we have more work to do, to convince our potential customers, it is the right thing to do.

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