

## Let's Prove What We Think We Know!



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Ask just about any commercial beef producer or feedlot owner to name the unsung hero in any feedlot in America and the likely answer will be a “dark-nosed smokey” or a Charolais-influenced calf. We’ve known for years, albeit anecdotally, Charolais and Charolais-influenced cattle have been some of the most profitable in the feedyard and at the packer level. Yet, we have very little data to prove what we think we know. Well, that’s about to change.

Earlier this fall, we set out to collect feedlot and carcass data on Charolais and Charolais-influenced cattle. We contacted Tom Brink, Senior Vice President and Chief Risk Officer, Five Rivers Ranch Cattle Feeding LLC, the largest cattle feeding operation in the world. Tom was willing to share data he had recently analyzed. The Brink data documents the profitability of larger-framed, growth-oriented steers that have the genetic capacity to grow fast and efficiently to heavier finish weights—all in a high-cost environment. The data was collected on 42,000 steers and showed profits ranging from \$18.49 per head for the best converting to -\$29.59 per head loss for the lightest out weight steers. While not breed specific, the heavier finish weight steers represented a distinct Continental influence. After seeing data collected by Brink, now is the time to invest in an ongoing study to truly validate this breed.

By the time you are reading this, AICA will be launching the Charolais Feedyard Performance Field Study. Shawn Walter of Pro-

fessional Cattle Consultants (PCC), headquartered in Weatherford, Oklahoma, will conduct the ongoing study. PCC has been providing performance and benchmarking data for the feeding industry for 40 years. PCC currently provides benchmarking and data analysis tracking performance and progress to approximately 100 feedyards as well as branded beef programs and beef marketing systems.

While the details are being finalized, the content of the study is as follows:

1. Yards currently feeding significant numbers of Charolais and Charolais-influenced cattle will be targeted with the goal of selecting 10-20 yards.
2. The program is being designed to make the field study resemble a research trial, with the advantage of much larger numbers of cattle.
3. Data will be collected on a minimum of 10,000 to 15,000 head of Charolais and Charolais-influenced steers. The steers will have placement weights +/- 25 pounds of each other. Similar placement dates and similar out dates within +/- 30 days.
4. The cattle identified as the Test Group will be phenotypically identified and exhibit hide colors consistent with Charolais and Charolais influence. Phenotypic appearance will also be consistent with Charolais and include above average muscularity, frame size and body length. Non-Charolais steers identified as the Control Group will be selected based on similar placement weights, placement dates and implant regimes with no apparent Charolais influence.

The project is ongoing and anticipated to conclude in approximately 24 months. The study will analyze data reflecting closeouts in all four quarters of the year. The length of the project will enable us to compare feedlot efficiency and profitability data reflecting the ebb and flow of input costs through all four seasons. Timing of the study will also illustrate the seasonal demands for beef and the direct impact demand has on profitability.

Without question, the study will provide invaluable information and is long overdue. Those beef producers using Charolais genetics will already, at some level, know the answers. Yet for every Charolais seedstock producer selling bulls to commercial beef producers, the results of this study can serve as a benchmark in genetic evaluation.

Sir Francis Bacon is credited with saying “knowledge is power” more than 400 years ago. He would no doubt be in utter amazement at how much we know—and how much more we have to learn.