Updated: 12/1/21

Grass to Grid

F.A.Q.'s

Calf qualifications

Why do you require 5 head minimum for mixed-sex and 3 head minimum for same sex?

The goal of the program is to learn about how well your operation produces cattle that meet industry standards while also learning about the cattle industry beyond the cow-calf phase. Since steers and heifers perform differently, the committee set a greater minimum for mixed sex lots. To better reflect herd productivity, more than the minimum should be enrolled such as 20% of the calf crop, however, there is also risk with retained ownership, so the committee set a minimum that would be less than this 20% for most operations.

Why the 500 to 800 pound weight range?

Calves will be fed in groups. The more cattle enrolled, the better control the feedyard will have over group size. When less cattle are enrolled, there can be more weight variation in the pen. Pen closeouts don't occur until the last calf is marketed. The 500 to 800 pound weight range was chosen to hopefully accommodate most situations where producers won't have to wait too long between the first and last animal is marketed.

Why no more than 3/8 Brahman influence?

The feedyard is a northern environment. Cattle with more Brahman influence may perform well during summer feeding but since the program encompasses both winter and summer feeding, maintaining a modest level of maximum Brahman influence should accommodate both environments.

Weaning to shipping management

Why do you recommend modified live vaccination?

Modified live will help establish a stronger immune response than a killed vaccine. Cattle will also receive a modified live booster at the feedyard. A good vaccination program is important since cattle will be fed a commingled lots with other cattle and the goal of the program is to measure production which is hindered when a steer or heifer becomes sick.

How much grain should I feed?

Overfeeding cattle is a common mistake. Cattle that are over fed may get too heavy to participate. Cattle that are fleshy will have a poorer feed conversion and the feedyard can more likely put weight gain on cattle at a cheaper cost. Supplementing cattle at 0.5 to 1% body weight can keep them growing good while also making them accustomed to eating from a feed bunk.

Why do you require E.I.D. (electronic) tags?

Electronic tags are needed for carcass data collection at the packing plant and are less prone to error than manual transfer of numbered tags.

Fees and risk management

Why is there a non-refundable $5/calf UA fee?

This fee helps cover EID tag cost and distribution as well as provide Grass to Grid program education for participants at the county level. The fee is non-refundable to cover commitment costs.

Why do I have to transfer ownership for $5 to TCSCF?

The 'ownership' fee allows TCSCF leverage for working with lenders on operating loans. Otherwise, feed costs would have to be paid by participants on a regular basis instead of being deducted from calf sales at the end of the feeding period.

How does enrolling in risk management work?

There is inherent risk with feeding cattle. The TCSCF offers a risk management option that involves marketing cattle where they will most likely get the best value as opposed to marketing all cattle at 0.5" backfat and using a grid based value system.

Marketing and closeout

How are cattle marketed?

Cattle are marketed according to cattle type as well as quality grade premiums and discounts. Feedyard managers will market through channels to try to achieve the greatest value for the calf at finishing. Cattle that are less likely to perform well in a grid-based marketing system (premiums and discounts for quality and yield grade) will be marketed for weight target endpoint. Cattle that are more likely to perform well in a grid-based system will be marketed as such. Carcasses will be graded and carcass data conveyed in both situations. Certain cattle may qualify for branded programs according to grade and phenotypic characteristics; however, cattle will not be managed as a group for specialty markets such as 'all natural', 'age & source verified', etc.

How are costs allocated?

Shipping costs from Arkansas to the feedyard and from the feedyard to the packing plant are pro-rated among cattle based on size.

Feedyard yardage and veterinary costs are charged to the individual animal.

Feed costs are determined at closeout (when all cattle have been marketed from a pen). Feed cost is pro-rated to individual animals using a formula that accounts for both animal size and rate of gain.

Death loss is a loss to the individual owner. The costs associated with death loss will be affected by when the death loss occurred, and any expenses will have to be covered by the remaining cattle in the original owner lot.

Performance measures

What information will I gain from the feedyard?

The feedyard will report periodic weight gain performance. Following closeout, a full report of weights, weight gain, days on feed, average daily gain, total cost of gain, feed cost of gain, morbidity, and mortality, total cost including shipping and processing costs will be reported as well as calf value and net return.

The packing plant report will include hot carcass weight, dressing percentage, quality grade, yield grade, marbling score, ribeye area, backfat, and kph (kidney, pelvic, heart) fat.

What can I expect for risk and returns?

Feeding cattle has inherent risk. Risk may include death loss of a calf from disease or injury. Cattle that die will have feed and health costs that the margin from other cattle have to absorb. Any purchased insurance to offset economic losses associated with death loss is up to the individual calf owner and is not provided as a general risk management option through the Grass to Grid program. Cattle market volatility and feed price volatility can influence the cost and returns from feeding cattle. The Grass to Grid program does not provide financial risk protection; it is up to the individual cattle owner to decide if and how they choose to manage market risk. A producer that enrolls a large group of cattle may consider services that provide CME futures and options while producers with just a few head of cattle may consider a livestock risk protection insurance policy. Participants are encouraged to monitor the current market and futures market prices to determine what impact market prices might have on breakeven cost. The TCSCF does look at calf type and market conditions to decide how to market calves to try and get the most value for that calf. This may include marketing calves before they get to 0.5" backfat and marketing on the weight as opposed to carcass grid for cattle that may be discounted greatly on a carcass grid price valuation. Feed price is another source of risk. The cattle feeder will know current estimates of cost of gain but crop condition and other economic conditions can cause feed prices to either risk or fall.