

**NEW YORK FEEDLOT AND CARCASS VALUE DISCOVERY PROGRAM –  
FINAL REPORT**

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The feedlot performance of the cattle is shown in Table 1. Due to the low numbers of cattle fed through the natural program caution must be used when making comparisons between the two. The natural steers and heifers were lighter and younger on arrival compared to the conventional cattle; however they were heavier and older at harvest. In the conventional diet Rumensin™ was used to control acidosis and increase feed efficiency. Rumensin™ is classified as an antibiotic and could not be used in the diet fed to the natural cattle. To reduce the risk of acidosis more forage was fed to the natural cattle, which reduced the rate of gain. The result was that the natural cattle were fed an additional 30+ days to get them to the same degree of finish as the conventional cattle.

**Table 1. Feedlot Performance of cattle fed in the 2003/2004 NY Feedlot and Carcass Value Discovery Program using conventional and natural protocols.**

Item	Con. Steer	Natl. Steer <sup>a</sup>	Con. Heifer	Natl. Heifer <sup>a</sup>
No.	102	27	63	16
Initial weight, lb.	617	591	601	547
Finish weight, lb.	1194	1218	1065	1060
Death loss, % (no.)	2.9 (3)	3.7 (1)	1.6 (1)	12.5 (2)
Disqualified from Natural, % (no.)		14.8 (4)		37.5 (6)
Days on feed	165	193	146	176
Average daily gain, lb.	3.5	3.2	3.2	2.8
Feed to gain	5.6	6.2	5.6	5.9

<sup>a</sup>Natural animals are fed a diet that does not contain an ionophore, contains a higher proportion of hay and have not been implanted.

The two steers that dropped out of the natural program were treated and they subsequently graded select. The other two steers disqualified b/c of grading Select

Of the six heifers that disqualified 5 were disqualified b/c of treatment and 1 b/c of requiring grade

The impact of feeding protocol on carcass performance is shown in Table 2. The cattle from both protocols had similar hot carcass weight and ribeye area. To qualify for the \$0.14/lb (HCW) premium paid by Wolfe's Neck Farm, the carcasses must grade USDA low Choice or better. Therefore the cattle were fed to a higher level of backfat to increase the likelihood of meeting the required quality grade. The natural steers had nearly 19% more backfat than the conventional steers. Interestingly the natural heifers had less back fat than the conventional heifers. There was a higher percentage of continental influenced breeding (predominantly Simmental) in the natural heifers which might account for the lower backfat compared to the conventional cattle. As backfat is a key component in Yield Grade (YG), the steers in the natural pen had a higher numerical YG which means that they had a lower yield of lean boneless cuts.

There were two steers and 1 heifer that did not reach low Choice and therefore did not qualify for the natural premium.

**Table 2. Carcass Performance of cattle fed in the 2003/2004 NY Feedlot and Carcass Value Discovery Program using conventional and natural protocols.**

Item	Con. Steer	Natl. Steer <sup>a</sup>	Con. Heifer	Natl. Heifer <sup>a</sup>
No.	102	27	63	16
Hot carcass weight, lb.	734	748	650	672
Ribeye area, sq. in.	12.4	12.9	12.0	12.1
Backfat, in.	0.48	0.55	0.52	0.52
Yield grade <sup>a</sup>	2.9	3.2	2.9	3.1
% USDA Choice or higher	61.5	84.6	72.1	92.9
% Select	38.5	15.4	27.9	7.1

<sup>a</sup>Natural animals are fed a diet that does not contain an ionophore, contains a higher proportion of hay and have not been implanted.

The economic performance of the cattle is shown in Table 3. The combination of ionophores and implants has been shown to increase performance and in so doing reduce costs. This was seen in the feed cost of gain (FCOG), which is the cost to support a pound of gain. Conventionally raised steers and heifers, respectively posted a FCOG 12.9% and 6.1% lower than the natural cattle. The natural cattle were on feed longer which increased costs for labor and facilities (yardage), but as no cattle that were treated with antibiotics for sickness could qualify for the natural program, they had no medical cost. The total cost of gain (TCOG) still favored the conventional cattle by being 5.8% and 3.6% lower than the natural steers and heifers, respectively. Due to seasonal variation, the average price paid by Wolfe's Neck Farm for the natural cattle was actually higher than the \$0.14/lb offered. Remember too, that the mature size, as reflected by HCW was greater for the natural cattle. Even comparing the conventional and natural cattle at equal HCW and using the \$0.14/lb premium, the natural cattle still provided a net return that was higher than the conventional cattle. Further detailed analysis needs to be completed; however it does appear that producers that participated in the natural program were rewarded for their efforts.

**Table 3. Economic Performance of cattle fed in the 2003/2004 NY Feedlot and Carcass Value Discovery Program using conventional and natural protocols<sup>a</sup>.**

Item	Con. Steer	Natl. Steer <sup>a</sup>	Con. Heifer	Natl. Heifer <sup>b</sup>
No.	102	27	63	16
Feed Cost, \$/lb	\$0.31	\$ 0.34	\$ 0.31	\$ 0.42
Vet & medicine, \$/hd	\$2.65	\$ 2.12	\$ 0.81	\$ 6.53
Total cost, \$/hd	\$ 296	\$ 330	\$ 253	\$ 274
Total cost, \$/lb	\$ 0.52	\$ 0.54	\$ 0.55	\$ 1.16
Price, \$/lb hot carcass	\$ 1.42	\$ 1.57	\$ 1.42	\$ 1.54
Return to cow/calf operation <sup>c</sup>	\$719	\$801	\$657	\$640
Return to cow/calf operation <sup>d</sup>	\$740	\$832	\$668	\$732

Feeder value, \$/lb	\$1.21	\$1.42	\$1.12	\$1.36
Adj P/L w/ deads	\$131	\$231	\$143	\$151
Adj P/L w/o deads	\$156	\$266	\$156	\$257

<sup>a</sup> Adjusted to remove variation due to season. Base price, Choice YG3 steer = \$1.48

<sup>b</sup> Natural animals are fed a diet that does not contain an ionophore, contains a higher proportion of hay and have not been implanted.

<sup>c</sup> Deads included

<sup>d</sup> Deads removed

Due to the success of the natural program, we will be offering that option to producers for the upcoming program. I know several were disappointed that the marketing options did not include the New England Livestock Alliance. If enough cattle are consigned to fill a pen (~35 animals) we will dedicate that pen for marketing through NELA.

This completes the 8<sup>th</sup> year of the New York Value Discovery Program. Beef producers from New York, Pennsylvania, Vermont and Maine consigned 203 steers and heifers. Cattle were fed a conventional feedlot ration until they reached their optimum profit potential, at which time they were marketed to a commercial packer. Producers received detailed feedlot and carcass data that will assist them in determining the quality of their breeding and management program. For more information on how you can participate, contact Mike Baker, Cornell Beef Cattle Specialist, 607-255-5923, [mjb28@cornell.edu](mailto:mjb28@cornell.edu).