Characteristics of Dairy Steers

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Behavior

- Possess an innate ability for tongue rolling
- Have a natural tendency to lick on objects, such as gate latches
- Are gregarious and tend to move as a group
- Because of their curiosity, they are more difficult to drive – but may follow

Physiology

- Are later maturing than a beef animal
- Maintain more internal fat surrounding the viscera at any given weight
- Hence, maintenance energy is increased ~10%
- Consequently, feed efficiency and average daily gain is less than beef steers
- And, days on feed are increased
- Possess a thinner hide and hair coat, making them more susceptible to cold
- Have a shallower heel that is not as compatible with slatted floor housing
- May be more immune compromised, depending on colostrum intake
- Tend to have a higher feedlot death loss (3.5% average)

Carcass Traits

- Are taller statured
- Increased height correlates with loin bruising during transit
- Heights >58 inches increase the drag rate at the packing plant (6.3% drag rate)
- Taller heights interfere with fallout of viscera, which reduces harvest group size
- Tend to see more cryptorchids, which increases riding and bruising
- Increased incidence of liver abscesses (39% vs 19%, dairy vs beef in 2017)
- Have a smaller muscle to bone ratio – 3.1:1 versus 4.1:1 in a beef carcass
- Other disadvantages:
    - Decreased dressing percent (61.4 vs 63.4 for dairy vs beef)
    - Increased KPH
    - Smaller REA (12.5 sq. in., NBQA 2016) & narrower strip loin conformation
    - Decreased boxed beef yield (67.3% vs 69.2% for dairy vs beef)
- Potential advantages:
    - Age and source verified
    - Native, unbranded hides
    - Increased ability to marble Choice and Prime (1/3 Prime tonnage from dairy)
    - Less fabrication trim (9:1 vs 5:1 Muscle to Trim Fat Ratio for dairy vs beef)