



Carcass Merit in Santa Gertrudis

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The interest in improving carcass merit, a “catch all” term for carcass quality (marbling or quality grade), lean yield and tenderness, is not new in the beef industry. It has been ongoing for at least a 100 years, since the development of the live animal and beef carcass grading programs developed (and often revised) by USDA and adopted on a voluntary basis by the beef industry. Interest

in improving carcass merit was the driving force behind the development of the American or Eared breeds (breeds of cattle with *Bos indicus* genetics) and certainly in the Santa Gertrudis breed—why else was Shorthorn included? And carcass merit traits were among the first to have Expected Progeny Differences (EPDs) calculated (coming after birth, weaning and yearling weights) even though most commercial producers sold their calves at weaning, then and now.

Santa Gertrudis breeders have been working on improving carcass merit for many years. In the early 1990s, when we were conducting the TAMU Ranch to Rail South Program (which had a lot of Santa Gertrudis cattle enrolled over the 14 years), Ben Olivarez and a group of Santa Gertrudis breeders who had participated in it asked me to help them with a Ranch to Rail Program for Santa Gertrudis cattle. That program ran independently for several years. The data collected was used by the breeders, but I don't think it was ever promoted much. However, Santa Gertrudis breeders and the SGBI were among the early adopters of ultrasound technology and genomics (Bovigen's GeneStar™) to improve muscling, marbling and tenderness in the late 1990s. SGBI conducted a National Steer Feedout Program for over 10 years collecting feedlot and carcass data (including tenderness) on several hundred head of steers at King Ranch Feed Yard. Santa Gertrudis breeders continue to collect ultrasound data and participate in steer feedouts and bull gain tests continue to collect carcass merit data.

Fortunately, selection for improvement in carcass merit is relatively easy since it is higher in heritability than many traits that are much more important to commercial cow calf producers, such as fertility and weaning weight. However, the data is not inexpensive to collect. There is cost involved both financially as well as in time. To collect ultrasound or carcass data, animals must be held and developed past weaning time for ultrasound measurements or fed even longer and slaughtered for carcass data collection. Benefits of ultrasound include being able to collect some “carcass” data (ribeye area, intramuscular fat to estimate marbling, and 12th-13th rib fat thickness – but not tenderness) on live animals. Often it is the animal of interest and its' half- or full-sibs scanned. Having several measurements on related animals improves selection accuracy and if the data (and the EPDs) are acceptable, the animal is available for breeding.

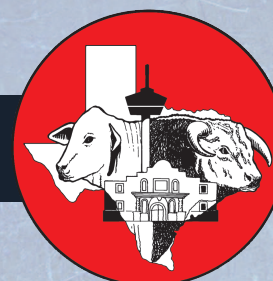


Feeding half or full-sibs in a feeding program and then collecting carcass data increases the amount of time and cost, but also improves the accuracy of the carcass EPD. However, some of the sibs fed and harvested may have been genetically superior to the selected individual. Progeny of the individual can be used instead but the amount of time to get the data increases. The amount of time and financial expense required for accurate data must be considered. Many Santa Gertrudis breeders are doing just that to offer their customers the best in carcass merit their breed has to offer.

When I was younger, the Santa Gertrudis breed (in general) was more of a maternal breed rather than a carcass breed. I still consider Santa Gertrudis to be more of a maternal breed than a carcass breed. Santa Gertrudis (like all *Bos indicus* influenced breeds) tend to have relatively smaller ribeye area and slightly more 12th-13th rib fat than most beef breeds (fed to the same weight) which reduces their overall lean yield. Similarly, they tend to not be as highly marbled. There are exceptions to those generalities. However, I know that Santa Gertrudis are not as lightly muscled, nor as low marbling as they once were and are certainly much more tender than many think!

Breeders of any breed have a responsibility to know how their cattle will perform in the feed yard and in the carcass if their customers feed their cattle. Even if a breed is not a “carcass breed”, ALL of their genetics (as calves) will eventually show up in a feed yard and later as beef. If your breed “fits the norm” for feed yard performance and carcass merit (and Santa Gertrudis and it's crosses certainly do) and doesn't create any “outs” (poor feed yard performance or carcass merit) then the breed can focus on its strengths – adaptability, longevity, fertility, maternal performance and growth. Just like Santa Gertrudis.

Here's two **big opportunities** for you to add our genetics to your program



February 13th
San Antonio Livestock Show
San Antonio, Texas



We will be selling two pens of five first calf heifers. These females are Star 5 and are 24-26 months old. They will sell with 60 days Angus sired calves at side and the females will be ready to breed back to the bull of the buyers' choice. These two pens are the same quality of the pens that won this event in 2015 and 2016—back to back overall champion pen of females.

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Thank You!
 We'd like to thank the buyers of our lots at the Tri-Star Sale

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- Briggs Ranch
- Wendt Ranches
- Kersey Calley Farms
- Kelly Vesper
- Matt Kubena
- Jerry & Pat Stults
- Rodger Stout
- Tommy Shealy

Your evaluation and acceptance of our program is extremely gratifying and motivates us to make them even better this year.



(L to R) Jim Corporron, Kelsey Jones Cawley with son Riley Jax, Laura and Joe Jones, Barbara and Rodney Corporron.

Santa Gertrudis Are "Data Driven And Profit Proven"

By John Ford,
 Santa Gertrudis Breeders International Executive Director

Feed yards continue to target cattle capable of producing more Choice and Prime carcasses. In fact, about 70% - 75% of all finished cattle sell in carcass-merit grids and formula pricing systems. Price premiums for high-marbling feeder cattle have increased and will continue to do so in the years ahead. Discounts for animals that lack the genetics to hit end-point targets will become more severe. Because marbling is an important value determinant for wholesale beef and fed cattle and because the industry is working to eliminate Select beef, cattlemen are becoming focused on improved marbling genetics.

Unfortunately, Santa Gertrudis cattle are often unfairly portrayed as inferior from a carcass quality standpoint by a segment of industry members. However, no one breed holds a monopoly on superior carcass quality and contrary to popular belief, it is not driven by hide-color. In fact, when looking at a national average, fewer than one in four Angus and Angus-influenced animals harvested at licensed plants meet all 10 Certified Angus Beef carcass specifications needed to qualify as a Certified Angus Beef® branded product. Research results clearly indicate that genetic variation exists both between and within breeds for many important beef cattle performance measures, including carcass quality.

Selection within breed populations is a very effective tool for improving carcass traits and Santa Gertrudis Breeders International's reliable genetic evaluation ensures that cattlemen can make sound comparisons and identify animals that perform at the highest level hitting all industry desired end-point targets. Sixty-six purebred Santa Gertrudis steers representing 25 different sire groups were fed at AZTx Feeders, Hereford, Texas in the association's 2017-2018 National Steer Feedout. The steers were harvested June 29, 2018 at the Tyson Beef Plant in Amarillo, Texas. The cattle graded a remarkable 96% Choice, with 51% reaching the Premium Choice mark. The data, collected by the Beef Carcass Research Center-West Texas A&M University, reveals that the Santa Gertrudis genetic package reaches desired quality grade targets and does so in an effective, efficient, and profitable manner. The steers' average Yield Grade was 2.98 with 50% of the carcasses being Yield Grade 1s & 2s. The data becomes even more striking when taking into consideration that the Ribeye average was 14.0 and the cattle gained 3.51 pounds per day during the feeding period.

Improving carcass quality is important and the performance of Santa Gertrudis cattle in the feed yard and hanging on the rail is impressive. However, applying heavy selection pressure for one or a limited number of traits, while neglecting others will not work. Breeding cattle is a balancing act and producers must not only be aware of the demands of the marketplace but also mindful of production environments. Many beef cattle associations market their breed's carcass traits while others tout their animal's maternal strengths. However, the Santa Gertrudis breed offers cattlemen a near perfect balance of maternal, growth, and carcass traits in one profitable genetic package. While the feedout data speaks volumes about the breed's ability to perform in the yard and on the rail, information released in late 2018 by Utah State University, showed Santa Gertrudis cross calves were four pounds lighter at birth and 30 pounds heavier at four months of age than their straight bred black-hided Bos tarsus contemporaries, highlighting the breed's ability to perform profitably in the pasture as well.

Few breeds are capable of hitting the end-point targets demanded by today's beef industry without sacrificing fertility, growth, and efficiency. Santa Gertrudis cattle provide cattlemen with a balanced package that allows genetic improvement in growth and carcass merit while maintaining a good maternal fit with the environment. Santa Gertrudis are **DATA DRIVEN** and **PROFIT PROVEN**

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