



## The VIEW FROM HERE

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Given the rising cost of feed, it should come as no surprise that more and more people are touting the benefits of efficiency. Efficiency has always been one of the more elusive traits to measure, especially when you consider the average pen size of the average U.S. feedlot.

Truth is, very few operations have the ability to measure feed efficiency and its associated cost. One place capable of measuring feed efficiency is the Great Western Beef Expo. The test measures many of the same traits as traditional bull tests, with the added bonus of furnishing feed efficiency data.

The 2008 test is only halfway finished, but looking through the results thus far provides a glimpse of the true value of feed efficiency.

This year, there are 155 animals (both steers and heifers) on test representing 31 sire groups. The Limousin breed is well represented with three programs having entered three pens of steers and one pen of heifers.

At the halfway point, a pen of Lim-Flex heifers entered by Coleman Limousin Ranch of Charlo, Montana, is leading all entries (steers and heifers) in the category of feedlot gain. In an attempt to compare apples to apples, I analyzed the data for the 60 heifers on test.

The average daily gain for the entire group is 2.78 lbs., while the Coleman pen is averaging 3.75 lbs., which has resulted in 151 lbs. of additional gain. It's interesting to note, this pen of heifers is consuming .95 lbs. less feed per pound of gain—.62 for the Coleman pen versus .75 for the average.

At the risk of offending statisticians and scientists the world over, I decided to project that performance throughout the duration of the 156-day test.

To get a feel for the value of feed efficiency, I penciled out three different scenarios.

Let's assume for a minute, feed efficiency remains the same for both the Coleman pen and the overall heifer average.

If both groups gain 2.78 lbs. per day (the current heifer average), the feed cost for the Coleman pen would be \$56.38 less during the entire test.

If both groups gain 3.75 lbs. (the current Coleman average), the feed cost for the Coleman pen would be \$76.05 less.

Taken one step further, if the entire group of heifers continues to average 2.78 lbs. of gain, it will take them an additional 73 days on feed to reach the final weight of the Coleman heifers if they continue clipping along at 3.75 lbs. Given their current conversion rate of 6.27 lbs. of feed for each pound gained, the added feed cost would be \$153.99. I realize this scenario has more to do with ADG than feed efficiency, which drives home the point that feed efficiency without growth is not nearly as important as a healthy combination of the two.

Show me a cattle feeder anywhere who wouldn't be tickled to death to save \$56 per head on feed costs alone, much less \$154, with faster gaining, more efficient cattle.

With feed costs projected to remain historically high, it's hard to imagine a trait anymore economically relevant than feed efficiency. Combine feed efficiency with above average average daily gains, and you have the proverbial goose that lays the golden egg.

The only fly in the ointment will be the ability to measure efficiency and accurately identify the truly efficient cattle on an industry-wide scale. Several breeders, bull tests and DNA companies are taking the lead in this endeavor.

Given the Limousin breed's inherent advantages in efficiency, I can't think of a more worthwhile project for our breeders to undertake.