

# CHAROLAIS *edge*

VOLUME 23, ISSUE 2

|

SPRING 2025

VALUE-ADDED

SOLUTIONS

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## INVESTING IN A LONG-TERM BEEF VALUE CHAIN



By Brett Spader

American-International Charolais Association

The recent frigid temperatures aside, we're experiencing a great time to be in the cattle business. Record prices combined with value-added opportunities, improved genetic selection tools and

a consumer that continues to generate demand are all playing important roles in the success of our industry. The challenge today is the same question our fathers and grandfathers faced, "Where do we go from here and how do we get there?"

There's no doubt that, as an industry, we've been in a quality revolution for the past forty years, arguably since the early nineties when the first National Beef Quality Audit was instituted.

We may be experiencing the lowest cow herd numbers since the 1950's, but quality is the leading driver of the demand and consequent price we are seeing today. We are where we are today because of industry and producers' foresight to make value chain investments that are paying dividends today. It

The quality revolution we've driven is rooted in the advancements we've adopted. From the introduction of performance testing in the '50s and '60s to mapping the cow genome in the early 2000's and the discussions of gene editing today, we've consistently pushed the performance envelope as an industry and as an association. And yes, these decisions and adoptions are investments in the greater good of the U.S. cow herd but, ultimately, they are the drivers of profitability for the average size cowherd in the U.S. - around 40 head. More with less.

As we see the peak of bull season and think about conversations with commercial customers, let's keep the opportunity to share the importance of quality should be top-of-mind. For a commercial producer, it is easy to focus solely on pounds produced; that is their revenue for their operation, after all. As a seedstock producer, take the opportunity to help your customers match the genetics in their herd to a bull that complements their program - quality will follow. It's not enough for us to identify superior genetics at the seedstock level, our goal should always be to find ways to multiply and distribute throughout the commercial sector. Our goal, from cow-calf through the packer should always be to create a premium product that drives demand and delivers sustainable profit.

The future of the cattle industry depends on our ability to maintain and, hopefully, increase consumer demand. Like the producers from generations before us, let's put in the work needed to continue to improve the quality and efficiency that will allow us to hand down a profitable, sustainable and demanded way of life to the next generation.

*We are where we are today because of industry and producers' foresight to make value chain investments that are paying dividends today.*

didn't happen overnight or by luck, it was intentional and took an immense amount of work.

In 2006 around 54% of our beef supply chain graded Choice or Prime. Fast forward to 2024 and we're seeing around 84% grade Choice or Prime. It's important that we look at those numbers for what they are, more than statistics, they are a testament to the investment breed associations and seedstock and commercial producers are continuing to make in cattle quality and efficiency.



# BULL SELECTION: THE VALUE OF AN INVESTMENT

today's market. Brown related approaching the purchase with the same care as purchasing a vehicle:

"Are you prioritizing cost, functionality or long-term value," he asked producers in attendance.

"Bulls should be chosen based on their ability to meet the specific needs of an operation rather than opting for the cheapest option. A bull is an investment, and we need to do all we can to make the right selections...the best selections."

At the time this article was written, five-weight steer calves were selling for a ballpark \$3.50 per pound or a little over \$1800 per weaned calf – that calculation makes a good bull worth a little over \$9,000 based on this method of valuation.

Five finished steers have a median value of around \$2.50 per pound, translating to a value of about \$2300 each or an \$11,000 valuation of a bull.

Going a step further, retained ownership through finishing produces around 1500-pound slaughter steers worth about \$2 per pound or \$3000, valuing a bull purchase at \$15,000.

A key metric for valuing bulls is their contribution to weaned calves or finished steers, which directly impacts profitability.

Brown encouraged producers to use the

tools they have available to ensure they aren't leaving money on the table in a bull purchase.

"Advancements in cattle genetics have provided us with tools like Expected Progeny Differences (EPDs) to make informed decisions. EPDs quantify traits such as birth weight, growth rates, carcass quality, and maternal characteristics. It tells us what's under the hood and inside the cab that we can't tell just by looking at the outside," he told producers.

He stressed that every producer pays for a good bull—either upfront through strategic investment or later through lower returns on calves.

"A bull that adds 20 pounds of weaning weight per calf at \$3.15 per pound generates an additional \$63 per calf; over 100 calves, this equates to \$6,300 in added revenue."

Looking ahead, Brown predicts that genetic tools will become standard even among commercial herds. Producers who embrace these advancements will gain a competitive edge by optimizing their herds' genetic potential. He cites examples of producers already using DNA testing to enhance decision-making and improve herd performance.

"You don't have to change—but you will have to compete with those who do."

*Brown suggested the appraisal as a good rule-of-thumb for producers to use when valuing a bull purchase in 2025.*

"Take a picture of five weaned calves. Value your bull off of those five weaned calves, or five finished steers, if you're retaining longer. What is the price of those five weaned steers or finished steers," Donnell Brown, R.A. Brown Ranch, asked attendees of the Cattle Selection presentation presented during the 2025 Cattlemen's College held in conjunction with the National Cattleman's Beef Association 2025 Convention and Tradeshow. "This is a good metric to use as the market ebbs and flows."

Brown suggested the appraisal as a good rule-of-thumb for producers to use when valuing a bull purchase in 2025.

Brown honed in on bull purchases during the session – a significant cost when cattle prices are moderate and a steep cost in

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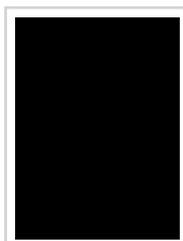
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 Winter Edge  
 Spring Edge

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CE: 10.8 BW: 1.1 WW: 50  
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302- M989218



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YW: 98 MILK: 22



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# March 19, 2025

# THE SCIENCE OF YIELD AND THE NEED FOR CHANGE

The science of yield, not dressing percent, actual red meat yield attained from a carcass as percent saleable yield was on the menu for a 2025 Cattleman's College session where a panel of industry experts shared with producers where we are today, where we need to go and a gave a glimpse of how we are going to get there.

In a handout provided by NCBA, one picture garnered a lot of attention and questions from the audience. The photo, below, shows two steers with the same calculated yield grade.



"That's the whole point," James Henderson, Bradley 3 Ranch, told the audience when asked how, as producers we're supposed to phenotypically select animals when our carcass yield grade system is so flawed.

"Today's yield grade does a very poor job – if those two animals have the exact same yield grade, that's a real good example of the problem."

Members of the NCBA Red Meat Yield committee, Glen Dolezal, Cargill; James Henderson, Bradley 3 Ranch; Ty Lawrence, Texas A&M; and John Sitka, Certified Angus Beef served on the panel, each presenting their respective research, findings and experience.

## AN OUTDATED SYSTEM

Since 1927, the U.S. beef industry has utilized a voluntary beef grading service. Originally, quality, estimated from visually assessing carcass finish, was the basis used to estimate how good a beef carcass was.

By the 1950s, the beef industry had recognized the need for a standardized method to measure and predict the yield of usable meat from cattle carcasses. This interest primarily came from the beef processing industry and research community. In 1960, Charlie Murphy and his colleagues from Texas A&M University introduced a small study of 162 cattle that measured 17 variables and ultimately settled on four key factors: a single measurement of external fat thickness, surface area of the ribeye, hot carcass weight, and percentage of kidney, pelvic and heart (KPH) fat. That formula was indexed into a one-to-five scale, and is still used today, known as the Yield Grade Equation.

"We are still using those four factors to calculate what we know as the boneless,

closely trimmed rib, loin, chuck and round," Ty Lawrence told attendees.

Lawrence, a Texas A&M Professor, grew up on a cow-calf operation and has spent his career working to improve the carcass grading system. He says that the shortcomings of using a system developed in the 1960's to determine yield grade are costly to the industry.

"The cattle that were representative of that time are not representative of today," he said showing a slide of the side-by-side photos of the champion steers at the Houston Livestock Show in 1950 and 2024.

"The carcass weight of the cattle we are producing today is near or more than the live weight of the animals the industry was producing when the yield grade formula was created," Lawrence said. "As everyone in this room knows, today we're making cattle heavier and heavier year over year to the tune of a little over five pounds of carcass weight added annually."

Today's cattle are bigger, more muscular, and genetically diverse compared to their 1950s counterparts.

Lawrence also called attention to the fact that the equation only focuses on the major subprimals – a large area of the carcass was never accounted for.

## TECHNOLOGY VS. HUMANS IN A CHANGING INDUSTRY

From the 1960's until today, human graders have served as the facilitators of carcass grading. In 2009, camera grading was introduced, however, disparity of use is still a major problem within the packing industry.

"We have much more accurate and much more repeatable outcome when we use the camera than when we use any number of graders with slightly different opinions as to what a carcass is," Lawrence explained, adding that even though camera grading is the gold standard amongst today's available options, use is varied.

"We could go into a facility today that doesn't have a camera; a different facility in which they only use a camera for in-house data collection and yield purposes, not to buy cattle; and we could go into a facility where a camera is used to purchase every animal."

In addition to cameras, growth-promoting implants, beta-agonists and improved feeding knowledge and technology have dramatically changed how cattle are raised and finished. The advancements have outpaced the grading system's ability to accurately assess today's cattle types.

"The current equation only predicts about 40% of the variability in red meat yield for beef-type cattle. It fails entirely [to predict variability] for Holstein cattle and is around 20% for beef-dairy cattle," he said.

Finally, the only way to accurately measure Kidney, Pelvic and Heart Fat in the yield grade calculation is to use a CT scan, a technology that is not practical or timely on a processing line.

## FIXING THE SYSTEM

For the past three years, members have dedicated time to serving on the NCBA Red Meat Yield committee that is focused on updating the current yield grade system to better serve producers and the industry.

An overarching agreement is that KPH should be eliminated from the yield grade equation. Further, the group agrees that KPH should be eliminated from what is being sold into the carcass.

"We need to strip it all out before it goes across the scale," Lawrence told the group. "That will reduce weight in a consistent manner and increase price per pound; the value upstream wouldn't change."

Within the committee there are proponents of maintaining a more standardized system while others favor scrapping the camera grading system for newer technologies.

Emerging opportunities with 3D imaging, Size-R technology – used to phenotypically evaluate live cattle – are currently being developed and trialed.

SizeR technology uses radar beams to scan live cattle, allowing for cattle to run through a chute system where the technology instantaneously develops a 3D model from live cattle scans. These 3D scans make predictions for round muscling, body depth, body girth, heart girth – many of the measurements that have been related not only to red meat yield, but also reproductive practices, body weight, body size, and maturity pattern. This technology has tremendous potential in selecting and sorting live cattle.

Additionally, the Red Meat Yield Working Group is currently involved in a large-scale collaborative multi-plant proposal that will take into account a biological type and region of the country to do a large-scale cut-out test leveraging all of these technologies as well on a thousand or more carcasses. The goal of the group is to begin collecting data as early as late summer 2025.

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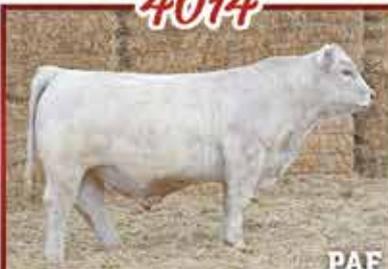
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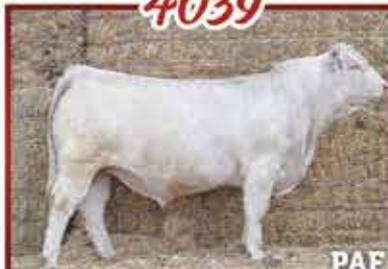
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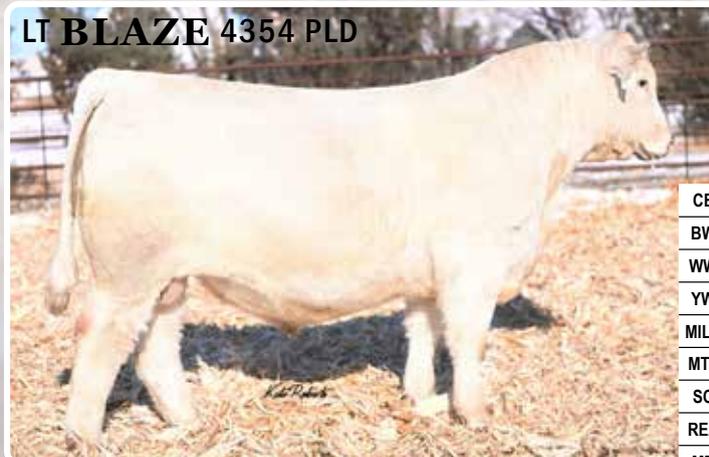
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BW	-0.8	60%
WW	86	2%
YW	135	15%
MILK	23	65%
MTL	66	15%
SC	1.0	55%
REA	0.80	35%
MB	0.17	35%
TSI	278.33	30%

LT Governor x LT Rushmore  
#M1002045 | DOB 2/11/2024 | PAF



**LT BLAZE 4354 PLD**

CE	9.8	65%
BW	-2.2	35%
WW	77	9%
YW	154	2%
MILK	27	40%
MTL	65	15%
SC	2.2	1%
REA	1.00	6%
MB	0.36	3%
TSI	297.65	6%

JSR Estrada 52E x LT Affinity x LT Ledger  
#M1002081 | DOB 2/13/2024 | PAF / HOP



**LT TREMER 4093 PLD ET**

CE	17.7	5%
BW	-3.4	20%
WW	65	45%
YW	110	60%
MILK	25	50%
MTL	57	50%
SC	1.0	55%
REA	0.76	40%
MB	0.24	15%
TSI	269.69	45%

LT Powerstroke x LT Blue Value  
#EM1001975 | DOB 1/29/2024 | PAF / HOP



**LT REGIONAL 4103 PLD**

CE	18.5	3%
BW	-5.0	5%
WW	84	3%
YW	152	2%
MILK	35	6%
MTL	76	2%
SC	2.0	2%
REA	1.18	1%
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# POWER OF YIELD

## INDUSTRY CARCASS VALUE COMPARISON

D. M. Wulf, Ph.D.  
University of Arizona  
January 2025



## A Study in Modern-Day Yield Value

In today's beef industry, every segment is required to do more with less. Given an increase in finished weights at harvest industry-wide and the need to meet higher efficiencies, Charolais genetics represent a superior choice for beef producers and industry stakeholders seeking to maximize carcass value. This analysis demonstrates that Charolais cattle consistently outperform Angus in both boxed beef and retail cutout values, offering significant financial advantages at every stage of the beef supply chain. With Charolais, the beef industry can expect increased yield and profit driven by enhanced yields in high-value cuts like ribeye, strip loin, and tenderloin. Whether you're a packer, retailer, or cattle breeder, incorporating Charolais genetics into your operation can lead to a direct boost in profitability, ensuring you're not only meeting market demand but also leading it.

### Methods and Assumptions

- Compared at a constant Quality Grade (USDA Choice) and carcass weight (900 lb.).
- Boxed beef prices from USDA Market News from week ending Dec 20, 2024.
- Retail beef prices from USDA Market News for Dec 2024, with missing retail prices calculated as standard industry markup from wholesale.
- Charolais and Angus average carcass composition determined using non-parent average EPDs from 2024 Sire Summaries and BIF 2024 Across-Breed EPD Adjustments.
- Breed average carcass composition converted to projected boxed beef and retail yields based on University of Arizona data from actual cutout data in controlled studies utilizing nine experienced meat cutters (mean = 23.1 years of experience), combined with data from multiple published beef carcass cutout studies from various universities.

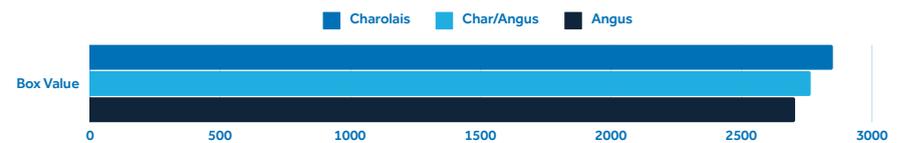


## Key Takeaways

### Packer Level (Boxed Beef)

- Choice 900-lb Charolais carcasses would have \$125 greater cutout value than Choice 900-lb Angus carcasses.
- Choice 900-lb carcasses from Charolais/Angus cross cattle would have \$60 greater cutout value than Choice 900-lb carcasses from straightbred Angus cattle.
- The majority (74%) of the cutout value advantage of Charolais, compared to Angus, comes from the Charolais value advantage in six packer products: Ribeye, Top Round, Strip Loin, Tenderloin, Bottom Round, and Lean Trimmings.
- These per-head advantages multiplied by a load, pen, shift, or week head count would result in huge value differences.

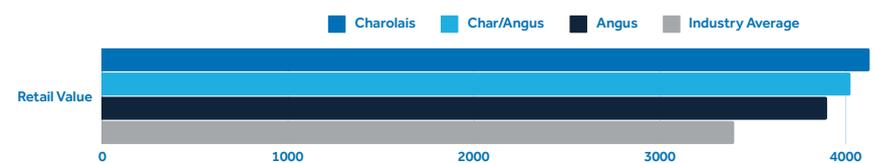
### Boxed Beef Value by Breed Composition



### Entire Industry (Packer and Retailer)

- Choice 900-lb Charolais carcasses would have \$201 greater retail cutout value than Choice 900-lb Angus carcasses.
- Choice 900-lb carcasses from Charolais/Angus cross cattle would have \$97 greater retail cutout value than Choice 900-lb carcasses from straightbred Angus cattle.
- The majority (76%) of the retail cutout value advantage of Charolais, compared to Angus, comes from the Charolais value advantage in six retail beef products: Ribeye Steaks, Strip Steaks, Top Round Roasts, Bottom Round Roasts, Tenderloin Steaks, and Ground Beef.
- Retail cutout value advantages of Charolais would be most realized in case-ready programs and vertically-integrated or vertically-coordinated beef programs.

### Retail Beef Value by Breed Composition



## Financial Highlights

### Increased Value

**\$326**

Per-head increase in total, post-harvest value and profitability due to inclusion of Charolais genetics.

### Industry Impact

**\$7.2b**

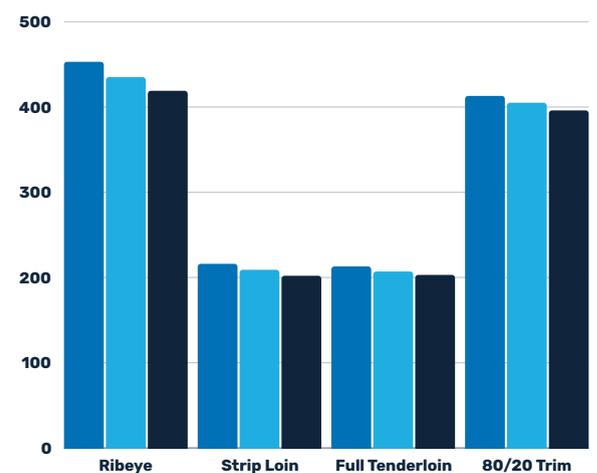
Economic effect of retail value in the U.S. beef chain with the addition of just 10% more Charolais-sired fed cattle.

### Boxed Beef Value

**5%**

Estimated increase in total boxed beef value due to the additional of Charolais-fed cattle due to yield advantages on Choice carcasses.

### Charolais Char/Angus Angus



Product	Charolais	Char/Angus	Angus
Ribeye	~450	~430	~410
Strip Loin	~220	~210	~200
Full Tenderloin	~210	~200	~190
80/20 Trim	~410	~390	~370



# PUT HIGH CATTLE PRICES TO WORK IN 2025

“Why do we ranch? There’s a lot of reasons, but the reality of most people’s situation is that they ranch to make money,” says University of Missouri Agriculture Economist Wesley Tucker.

The difference between profitable and unprofitable ranches, Tucker says, lies in their management system. Finding that system will vary from operation to operation due to differing circumstances and resources – no two ranches are the same.

The key is understanding how to convert resources into profit.

“The practices you use to convert sunlight into grass into something that you can sell is what makes you money,” Tucker says. “The ‘man’ is the most important part of the word management, and how you set up your system and your knowledge of

how the system works is what makes you money.”

Many operations mistakenly use Schedule F to determine profitability, Tucker explains.

“If you are using your Schedule F to determine whether or not you are profitable, you aren’t taking into account your end-of-the-year expenditures.”

The only accurate way to assess financial health is through a comprehensive balance sheet. And although cattle prices are currently at an all-time high, historical

data from the Kansas Farm Business Management Association shows an average return of negative \$92.50 per cow over 42 years.

Tucker challenges this number: “No one wants to be average. We can’t afford to be ‘average.’” Even in challenging years, producers who operate with a plan can make money. The American beef industry was built on cheap land, cheap feed, cheap fuel, and cheap fertilizer,” Tucker notes, “but that’s no longer the case.”

Land and feed costs are significant challenges to profitability. Research shows

that 52% of profitability can be predicted using only one variable—feed costs—while depreciation and calf prices follow closely behind. Feeding strategies are crucial to managing costs.

“We don’t look at what we can grow in winter anymore; instead, we focus on storing enough in summer to make it through winter,” Tucker observes.

He encourages producers to think about feed in terms of protein and energy: “I don’t care how many bales of hay you have; I care about how many pounds of protein and energy you have.”

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Tucker emphasizes the importance of flexibility: "The most profitable people I work with are those who can run 100 pairs but choose only to run 75 while doing something different with the rest of their grass."

This might involve running stockers, harvesting fescue seed, or exploring other grass-based enterprises. Weaning weight has surprisingly little impact on overall profitability. Differences between top and bottom producers average only ±10%, while feed costs can swing by 300%.

"Production variables are important," Tucker says, "but what separates profitable from unprofitable producers is operating costs."

**TUCKER ENCOURAGES PRODUCERS TO IMPLEMENT THESE KEY STRATEGIES FOR 2025:**

- Create a comprehensive balance sheet
- Manage stocking rates carefully
- Improve grazing strategies
- Diversify operation income streams
- Focus on feed efficiency
- Continuously educate yourself about market changes

Maintaining profitability on the ranch remains challenging. Higher cattle prices have been met with higher input prices and challenging weather patterns. Now is a great time to review management strategies and explore new opportunities for making assets work effectively for your operation.

"The most successful producers approach ranching as both a business and an art. They understand that profitability comes from a holistic approach—combining scientific management, resource optimization, and creative problem-solving," Tucker adds.

Remember, success isn't just about numbers—it's about understanding your unique system and continuously improving your approach to cattle production.

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# POUNDS MATTER

# PROFIT COUNTS



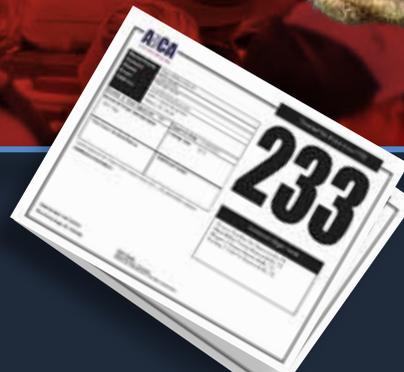
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AICA EM1000905 SIRE: WCF MR SILVER GUN 467  
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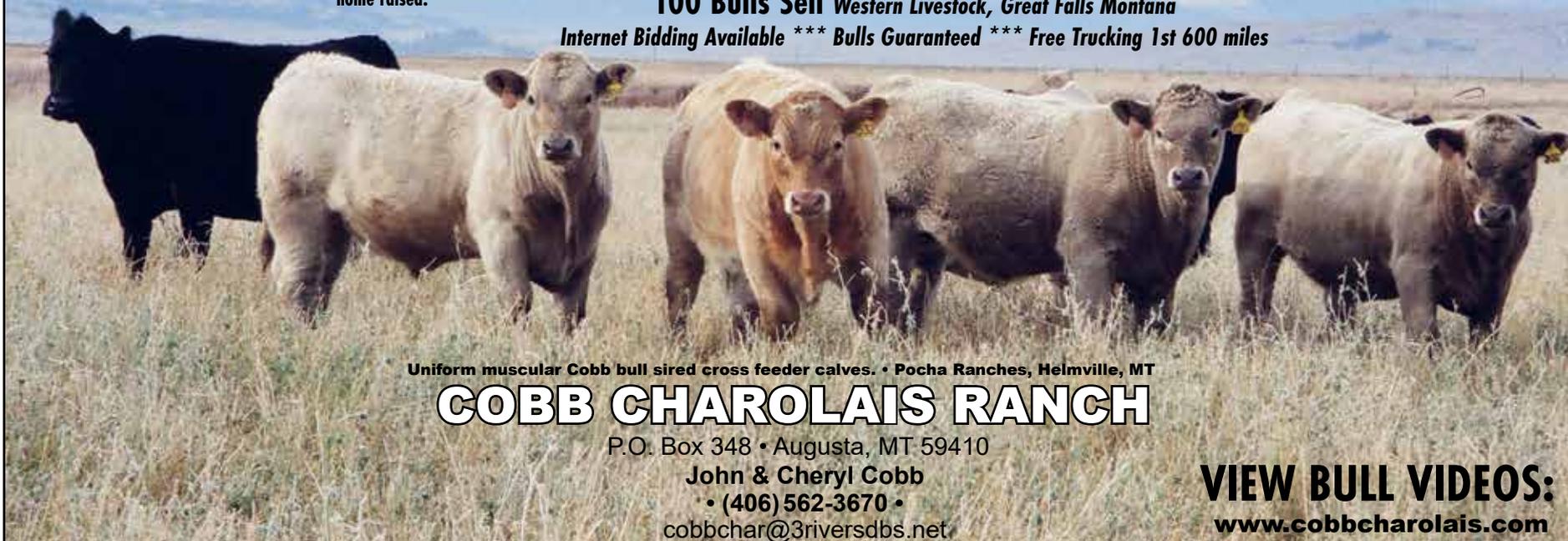
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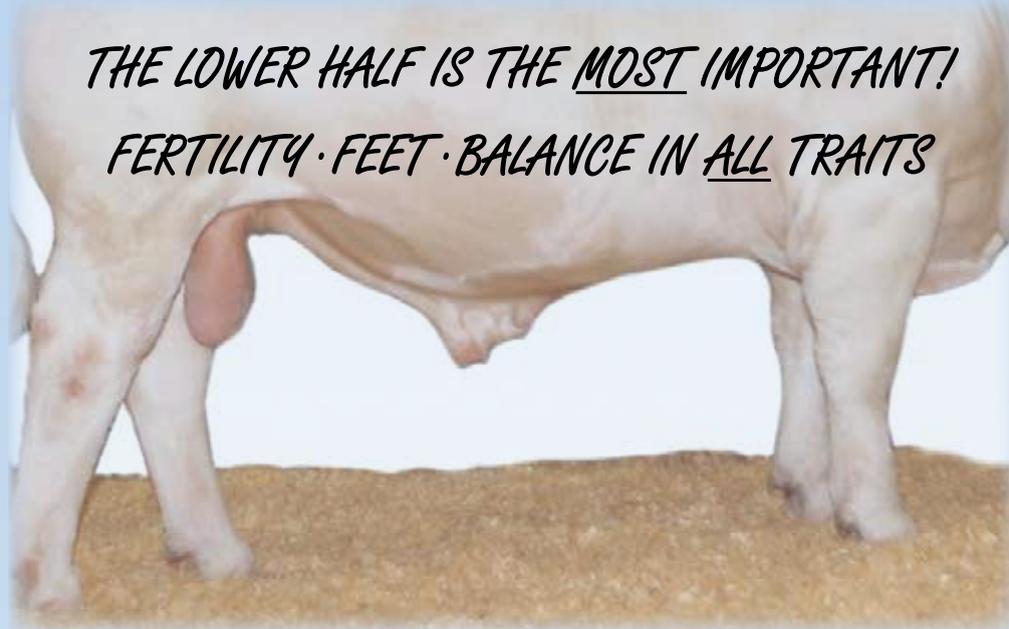
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