

## THE SHOW WAGYU

*By Dr. Jimmy Horner*

Many of the calls and emails I receive this time of year deal with questions about feeding and taking care of show cattle, and how the individual I'm conversing with can gain an edge on competitors. A new year marks the beginning of show season for thousands of families and few, if any; other activities in our industry produce the excitement, passion and competitiveness as that found in the show ring. Though the show circuit does not drive the marketing or true value of beef in the U.S., it does provide a forum to promote the various breeds to the public and for breeders to be able to visit with one another. Showing can also provide an opportunity for good family time and instill responsibility in our young people. Showing beef cattle as a student many years ago served as motivation for me to not only stay in school, but also to work to keep my grades up and possibly even attend college and major in agriculture.

The Wagyu industry is still a relatively small but rapidly growing segment of the U.S. beef industry and any positive exposure and opportunities to promote this unique and amazing breed are vital to the future success of the breed. Admittedly, strengths of the Wagyu breed lie in the exceptional quality and healthiness of the beef and as a very practical bull breed option for commercial cattlemen, yet the show ring provides yet another opportunity for the breed to be promoted and showcased to a public that needs to know the Wagyu breed is here and here to stay.

This article is intended to provide a few brief basics and tips I've gleaned from personal experience and the wisdom of others in feeding and caring for cattle being prepared to show. Obviously, show cattle are no different from other cattle nutritionally. Their feeding and management program must be designed to help them express their genetic potential; an emphasis must be placed on their overall health and well-being; and regardless of the "latest and greatest" gimmick, trick or silver bullet, there is absolutely no substitute for proper nutrition and good husbandry. Though my staff and I have developed a show program which we recommend to our clients, I'm the first to admit there are many different ways to successfully feed show animals. Commitment, consistency and animal comfort are the keys to success in the show ring just as they are in producing top quality beef and breeding stock.

### **Feeding Basics:**

- Select a feed that is consistent in quality, texture and smell; highly palatable; and meets the nutrient requirements of the animal you're showing.
- Young calves require more protein and less fat than older cattle, heifers need a ration slightly higher in protein and fiber than a bull or steer, and thinner cattle obviously need a ration higher in energy and lower in protein fed at a higher rate than cattle in good condition. A rumen bypass fat may be warranted to put cover on cattle more quickly as the show approaches.
- Be consistent, feeding twice daily at the same times each day. Cattle are creatures of habit and have excellent memories. Develop a routine and follow it each day.
- Start feeding your show cattle at 0.5% of bodyweight in grain per day and increase grain slowly over a 2-3 week period up to 1.5-2.0% of bodyweight in heifers and up to 2.0-3.0% of bodyweight in bulls and steers. A good set of scales should be used to weigh the feed.
- Monitor manure texture to fine-tune the bodyweight ranges of grain fed. Consistent, slightly firm manure that does not splatter is desirable and indicates the proper balance of grain and forage are being fed. Loose, watery manure as well as firm, dry manure should be avoided.
- If feed is changed such as going from a starter to a grower, do so over 3-5 days blending the two feeds together in a 50:50 blend. It is not advisable to change to a different brand or physical form of feed during the feeding period.
- Do not forget the need for good quality grass hay. Free-choice hay is a good practice at the start of the feeding period changing to limit-fed hay later. When limit-feeding hay, a minimum of 1-2 flakes should be fed. The ill-advised practice of not feeding hay as a means to encourage feed intake can be disastrous. Limited use of beet pulp shreds or a commercial depth/rib enhancing product at 2-5 lbs. daily may be warranted in some cases for cattle needing additional rib or body, but nothing takes the place of long-stemmed hay in developing depth and volume.
- Supplements are not required and should only be fed for a specific purpose such as improving hair growth, appetite, body depth, bone and joint issues, etc.
- Provide a source of clean, fresh, accessible water at all times as the amount of water consumed has a significant impact on feed intake. So, keep water troughs cleaned out regularly.
- Keep the show cattle as comfortable as possible at all times with proper shelter, adequate bunk space, plenty of room to exercise and in an area with good ventilation and drainage.
- Be patient and never make abrupt changes during the feeding period.

**Preparing for the Show At home:**

- Start handling cattle just as you will at the show during the last few weeks prior to showing.
- During the final week before the show, a good practice is to make “tie outs” in a barn or along a fence and tie cattle as they’ll be at the show. Begin tying cattle up while they eat and start feeding out of the same pan and water out of the same bucket/pail to be used at the show.
- Make sure the bedding is the same type used at the show.
- The last two feedings before you leave for the show reduce the amount of feed to 2/3 of the normal amount. This will help the cattle to travel better, relieves stress during transport and should result in a hungrier animal once arriving at the show.
- Since some animals may refuse to drink water of which they are not accustomed due to taste or odor, adding a cup of molasses, sugar or Jell-O to the water (cup per 5 gallons) at home 5-7 days prior to the show and again while at the show can help avoid this common occurrence.
- Help cattle get adapted to crowd noise, unfamiliar sounds, etc. by playing a radio, recordings, etc.
- Prior to loading cattle for the show, administer a good quality probiotic paste to help enhance appetite and minimize stress during transport.

**At the show:**

- Upon arrival, do not feed or water cattle immediately.
- Focus on getting cattle settled in their stalls and allow them time to rest, especially if the trip is over one to two hours or if the trip occurred over less than ideal terrain or during bad weather conditions.
- After some rest time, offer 1-2 flakes of good dry hay.
- Offer grain at 1/2 to 2/3 of the usual amount at the first feeding following arrival and gradually increase the amount at each feeding.
- Water should also be limited initially to prevent cattle from gorging themselves. Add flavoring to water as needed (use the same flavoring agent as used at home) to encourage consumption during the show. Water is not typically offered until after cattle have eaten.
- Keep cattle on the same feeding schedule as when they were at home.
- Try not to bother cattle while they eat. Do not comb, brush, etc. while cattle are trying to eat.
- Adjust rope length as needed to ensure cattle have enough length to reach into feed pan.
- If cattle are not eating well, administer a good quality probiotic paste. Lack of exercise can also contribute to reduced appetite and walking the animal can help stimulate appetite.
- Feed not cleaned up in 30 minutes should be removed and feed pans cleaned after each feeding.
- One or two flakes of grass hay may be laid out in front of the tie-outs after the evening feeding so cattle can eat during the night.