

# Relaxed Management Improves Cattle Disposition

**W**hen research is conducted, most of the time results aren't predictable. That's the foundation for good scientific method. But sometimes, indirect results can be the real surprise.

So say scientists at the J. Phil Campbell Sr., Natural Resource Conservation Center in Watkinsville, Georgia. While conducting primary research on forage, they found that their style of handling the cattle contributed to development of a calm herd.

Animal scientist John Stuedemann and other researchers before him have conducted forage research with their resident herd of Angus cattle, which was established in the 1950s. The 250-cow herd has been receiving disposition scores for the past 5 years from the finisher outfit, Tri-County Steer Carcass Futurity, in Iowa.

"We like to handle our herd in a slow and calm manner, which may account for their good disposition scores," says Stuedemann.

Calves are given the scores during each trip through the cattle chute. A score of 1 means the calf is so calm it may just settle in for a nap; a 5 means the calf is ferociously uninhibited. Disposition scores of the Watkinsville steers and heifers ranged from 1.0 to 1.9, and most were below 1.5.

Stuedemann's philosophy is that because the researchers handle the animals so much, they want them to be as calm as possible. Any excitable or unstable cattle are removed to lessen the risk of injury to staffers, especially student workers. "The last thing we want is anyone injured by ornery cattle," says Stuedemann.

Management methods have also been modified to keep the herd relaxed. "Working the cattle can be rough or calm, and we feel the fastest way to work cattle is to do it slowly," asserts Stuedemann. "Aids sometimes used to restrain or hurry cattle along were thrown away at Watkinsville a long time ago. Cattle are more likely to go through the chutes calmly when pain is removed from the experience." This

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conditioning allows researchers to move the animals through the chutes for monthly weigh-ins without incident.

While calm cattle make life easier for those handling them, Tri-County also finds the health and average daily weight gain of the cattle to be excellent. In the 5 years of custom feeding with Tri-County, 816 head of steers and heifers posted average daily weight gains ranging from 3.1 to 4.6 pounds. Only 30 of those animals graded "Select," while the other 774 graded "Choice" or better. A total of 381 head earned the "Certified Angus Beef" label.

"The Watkinsville staff has done a fantastic job with their cattle in handling and selection," says Tri-County's Darrell Busby. "There are very few health problems, they gain weight well, and their quality grades are exceptional. Compared to other cattle we handle, we feel fortunate when Watkinsville cattle come in."—By Sharon Durham, ARS.

*This research is part of Rangeland, Pasture, and Forages, an ARS National Program (#205) described on the World Wide Web at [www.nps.ars.usda.gov](http://www.nps.ars.usda.gov).*

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SCOTT BAUER (K4148-10)



Angus cattle.