Florida cattlemen have long been concerned that Brahman derivative calves are unfairly discounted when marketed. For insight on this possibility two excellent studies were recently published that compared sale prices of different breeds of calves.

A study by Dr. Michael King of Colorado State University analyzed the records of calves sold by Superior Video Auction throughout the US over four years (King et al., 1996, 1997, 1998, 1999, CSU Beef Programs Reports). This analysis involved about 1700 lots annually, with 122 calves per lot, and included some calves from Florida. The study compared; 1) English and English cross, 2) English-continental cross, 3) English with ear, 4) continental with ear.

English and English-cross calves sold for the highest price, averaging $72.27 per cwt. In comparison to English and English-crosses, English-continental cross calves were discounted $-0.65 per cwt. English calves with ear and continental calves with ear were discounted $-2.32 and $-2.37 per cwt, respectively.

A second study by Steven Smith (Smith et al., 1998, 1999, Animal Science Research Report, Oklahoma State University) analyzed prices of 62,000 calves sold through 18 auction markets in eastern Oklahoma in October 1997 and April 1999. Angus calves were used as the base price which averaged $76.68 per cwt for steers and $66.75 per cwt for heifers.

In comparison to Angus steers, black-baldy steers sold for a $0.80 per cwt premium and exotic cross steer calves sold for a $1.43 per cwt premium. In comparison to Angus heifers, black-baldy heifer calves brought a $0.42 per cwt premium and exotic cross heifer calves brought a $2.40 per cwt premium.

In this Oklahoma study, steer calves with less than 1/4 Brahman breeding were discounted $-1.54 per cwt in comparison to Angus. Steer calves with more than 1/4 Brahman breeding were discounted $-6.01 per cwt in comparison to Angus. Heifer calves with less than 1/4 Brahman sold for a $1.43 per cwt premium in October 1997, but for a $-0.43 per cwt discount in April 1999. In comparison to Angus, heifers with more than 1/4 Brahman were discounted $-1.91 per cwt in October 1997 and $-4.53 per cwt in April.
These studies indicate that steer calves with ear are discounted $-1.00 to $-3.00 per cwt in comparison to English (Angus) or black baldy calves. Heifers with ear are discounted much less and may even bring a premium. In my estimation, the discount of calves containing less than 1/4 Brahman would not overcome the production advantages realized from Brahman breeding as used in Florida. If the calf exceeds 1/4 Brahman breeding, steer calves are discounted an average of $-6.00 per cwt, but heifers with more than 1/4 Brahman are discounted $-2.00 to $-4.50. The production performance advantage of Brahman breeding, as used in Florida, would probably overcome the price discount for calves containing more than 1/4 Brahman breeding.

It is probable that the more favorable prices paid for Brahman derivative heifers is due to their value as replacement females. This opportunity can certainly help the profit margin for many Florida cattlemen who produce good quality heifer calves.

There is a need for similar calf price data specific to Florida calves sold through auction markets and video sales. This information would be very useful in analyzing the economic value of crossbreeding systems involving Brahman. It would also provide direction to marketing alternatives for Florida cattlemen who produce Brahman derivative calves.

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