

NOBLE NEWS & VIEWS



LIVESTOCK

Junior Beef Excellence Program Continues With COVID-19 Changes



by Caitlin Hebbert, livestock consultant | cshebbert@noble.org

This year has certainly brought its fair share of challenges due to COVID-19. We all have made dramatic changes, cancellations and sacrifices, both within our personal lives and businesses. Agriculture has been no exception, from commercial and seedstock producers to the livestock show industry and the younger generation who support it.

One of the many activities that had to deviate from the norm was Noble Research Institute's Junior Beef Excellence Program, which recognizes area 4-H and FFA members for the carcass merit of the steers they show at junior livestock shows.

SHOWS CANCELED, BUT NOT HARD WORK

We all have had to do our part to help protect friends and neighbors this year, but doing so has at times resulted in less than ideal situations. Many youth were already deep into their commitments to raising show animals only to find out they would not be able to compete mere hours or days before their anticipated time in the ring. For me, it was especially difficult to stomach seeing high school seniors not be able to show their final animals.

Story continues on next page

However, it has been incredible to watch the industry pull together to help these kids and their families as shows across the country were canceled. Noble Research Institute, which has sponsored the Junior Beef Excellence Program since 1988, was determined to be part of this by continuing the program. We wanted to give students the best possible experience this year and to reward their hard work and determination regardless of the unique obstacles.

FINDING A HARVESTER

Typically, nominated steers are harvested at the Tyson facility in Amarillo, Texas. The Beef Carcass Research Center (BCRC) team from West Texas A&M University follows the steers through the facility and collects harvest and carcass data, which determine the winning steer.

Due to the onset of COVID-19, Tyson ceased to allow outside visitors inside their facility, and understandably so. The more packing plants that had to close due to outbreaks of COVID-19, the more our industry suffered. Tyson had to protect their employees and their service to the industry. They offered to send us camera data for our steers, but the BCRC team would not be able to follow the steers through the harvest process to ensure

data for all animals was collected.

Another facility — Caviness Packers in Hereford, Texas — did still allow outside visitors, so the BCRC team could collect the data. This gave us greater confidence that we would get a complete set of data for each animal, something I felt the participants truly deserved.

However, there was one catch: Caviness is primarily a cull cow/bull plant and doesn't harvest large numbers of fed cattle. Therefore, they do not operate on a grid basis.

FINDING OUR WINNER

The grid is what dictates the final dollar value for a carcass through specifying premiums and discounts for various yield grades, quality grades and carcass characteristics. Each packer formulates its own grid; there is no universal grid available. Not having the grid would make determining the winning steer more challenging, but I still felt more confident having the complete data set.

The original harvest date was postponed a few weeks (due to plant availability for our load of cattle), and the steers were harvested on April 17, 2020.

Once we had the harvest data, we created an algorithm in Excel to mimic the format of grid-basis pricing. Laney Hicks from Marietta,

Oklahoma, delivered the winning steer. Congratulations, Laney!

THANK YOU TO ALL

From the cattle buyer at Caviness to the BCRC team, several people went out of their way to make sure our program was able to deliver for the participants this year, for which I am grateful.

I am especially grateful for the participants' and their families' patience, cooperation and understanding as many aspects of the program were new and different this year. You all have been so kind and wonderful to work with. We are thankful for your participation in the program and your continued feedback, and we are honored to be a part of your year.

2020-2021 NOMINATIONS AHEAD

Now it's time to look forward to next season knowing that we will continue monitoring the situation and make adjustments as needed. The 2020-2021 program steer nomination will take place from 8 a.m. to noon Saturday, Nov. 7, 2020, at Noble Research Institute's Pasture Demonstration Facility (479 Noble Research Road in Ardmore, Oklahoma). 🇺🇸

