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Central NY Preconditioned Feeder Calf Sale Meets Price Goal

Melissa Bravo, N.Y./Pa. Correspondent Nov 14, 2016



Cornell Beef Program leader Bill Gibson said he was pleased with the results of the second central New York pooled feeder calf tel-o-auction.

“We had 25 calves for this auction and 10 bidders were on the call,” Gibson said.

The auction was held early last month. Sellers included Ron Maidens, Dan Hammond, Fred and Tim Ross, Gr Barton and Mark VanDerwerken. Two of the buyers were Allan Weinman of Hobart and Allen Hough of Bouckville.

Both Weinman and Hough felt the animals were of good quality.

“Usually you’re at an auction and you’re watching the other guy bidding against you and you can kinda get a feel for where he’s gonna stop,” Weinman said.

“This is definitely something different,” Hough said.

Both men picked up their feeder calves on Oct. 29, two weeks after the auction.

“We had the sellers truck their cattle to the Otsego Fairgrounds where they were weighed a final time,” Gibsor said.

“I’m new to the feeder business,” said Hough, 63, who recently retired from dairying. “I’ve still got the farm and wanted to diversify into something else.”

As a buyer, Hough said he wanted to connect with cow-calf operators, and he felt the program Cornell has put together was a nice way to meet like-minded producers.

“I want to start out doing it right,” Hough said.

He said the preconditioning and sorting of calves into uniform lots is a worthwhile investment. Like many dairymen, Hough has an eye for dairy cow qualities.

“This is a lot different buying these beef,” he said, adding that he’s planning on participating in the spring tel-c auction.

Gibson said he was pleased with the results and the overall price the sellers got for their feeder calves.

“The sale averaged \$1.39 for the steers and \$1.24 for the heifers,” he said.

A group of 10, 500-weight steers sold for \$1.41; a pen of seven, 600-weight steers sold for \$1.36; a pen of five 500-weight heifers sold for \$1.26; and three, 600-weight heifers sold for \$1.22. .

“Ninety cents a pound to \$1.10 a pound” was the going rate that same week at the livestock auction barns, said Weinman. “Knowing where these animals came from and not being subjected to the [comingling of animals] at the sale barn is worth a little more money. I’m quite happy with them.”

Weinman said he bought a pen from the sale to balance out his own group of Red Angus/Hereford calves. The lot of mostly Black Angus cattle was what he was looking for.

“Well-tempered, quite happy with them,” he said.

“Feedback on the process and our progress, what worked and did not work, is very important,” Gibson said.

Weinman offered his own thoughts on the process:

“The auctioneer started out trying to sell them all to one bidder. That isn’t the way to do it,” he said, adding that it negates the purpose of the other bidders who are used to bidding against each other in a sale barn environment. “But once they got going, they sold them in groups. A group of 500- to 550-average weights and another group of 550- to 600-average weights.”

As a buyer, Weinman said he wants to see the sale date and pickup date window closer together.

“What they really need to do next time is get all the animals at one location weighed, penned and picked up right after the sale,” he said. “They waited too long. Next time I’d like to know I am buying and picking up what I bought within a few days”.

Weinman said he doesn’t know if the calves were not yet at weight or if it was just a logistical problem trying to get calves from different sellers grouped together that delayed the pickup date.

“But they are trying hard to make this work, just need to tweak a few things next time,” he said.

Two steers out of a pen of five that Weinman bought had dysentery the day he picked them up. That pen, as a result, was held back. He said he’s made arrangements to pick up the pen.

“Rest of them are doing well. Even-tempered animals,” he said.

The central New York cattleman’s group met earlier this week to discuss the logistics of future sales.

“We are talking about when it would be possible to pull together a group of animals for another sale. Because vaccinations are a key part of our program, there needs to be some lead time,” Gibson wrote in the meeting invitation.

The earliest possible date for a future sale would be in January, perhaps a late winter/early spring sale of fall

calves or yearlings.

“When we spoke to ‘natural buyers’ they spoke of wanting 800-pound animals that have been fed as a group for 45-60 days. We’ve spoken to a couple farms who have the capability of providing that service, but it’s still a challenge out there for us. The success of our recent sale shows we can get buyers’ interest. So, we’re open to options,” Gibson wrote.

He said the group needs to get more formally organized.

“The Virginia and West Virginia groups can offer us some guidance [and] we’ve been looking into a grant to buy handling equipment and scales to make available to regional farms,” he said.

Melissa Bravo is a freelance writer covering southern New York and northern Pennsylvania.