

## **FEED ADDITIVE IMPROVES PRODUCTION EFFICIENCY**

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A recently approved feed additive, ractopamine hydrochloride is available to beef feedlots from Elanco Animal Health under the trade name Optaflexx. This feed additive can be fed for the last 28-42 days immediately prior to slaughter. Post-release trials utilizing calf-fed Holstein steers demonstrated an 18% improvement in daily gain, gain efficiency enhanced by 16%, increased hot carcass weight, ribeye area and a slight reduction in marbling scores (Vogel et al., 2005). With several Wisconsin producers feeding yearling Holstein steers, information was needed to determine if these heavier Holstein steers responded similarly to calf-fed steers.

To investigate these responses three groups of yearling Holstein steers which were placed into finishing barns directly off of pasture at the UW Lancaster and Arlington Agricultural Research Stations were utilized. A total of 192 steers were used to evaluate the response to feeding 200 mg/hd/d of ractopamine HCl as Optaflexx for 34 days prior to harvest. Steers were fed a typical Midwest finishing diet that contained approximately 85% concentrate and 15% corn silage on a dry matter basis. Carcass data were collected following harvest to evaluate responses.

Steers averaged 1220 lbs at the initiation of feeding Optaflexx. Steers receiving Optaflexx had 20% higher daily gains than steers not offered the additive. Dry matter intake was 5% higher while gain efficiency was improved by 14% for the Optaflexx treatment. Live and hot carcass weights were 17.5 and 11 lbs heavier, respectively for Optaflexx cattle. A tendency for greater ribeye area was observed when Optaflexx was consumed. Carcass fat traits were not altered as marbling scores, 12<sup>th</sup>-rib fat thickness and kidney, pelvic, and heart fat were similar between treatments.

Cattle feeders can expect to see increased gains and efficiency when Optaflexx is fed according to the label to yearling Holstein steers. Producers are encouraged to evaluate the economics as well as management implications when deciding whether to utilize the new additive. Again, it is important to understand the additive must be fed continuously during the 28-42 day window immediately prior to slaughter. The average price reported by WI DATCP for 1300-1500 lb Holstein steers in 2006 was \$76.50/cwt. The 5% higher intake for Optaflexx steers was valued at \$2.79 using \$150/ton DM feed costs. An extra 17 lbs of live weight can be valued at \$13 less the additional feed cost or near \$10/hd. Thus, the breakeven needed to cover the additive cost based on additional live weight can be calculated as \$10/34 days which is \$0.29/d. Producers should also evaluate this based on how they market their steers as the returns may differ when marketed live versus on the rail.

For additional information on the research or on managing feedlot cattle, contact your local agricultural extension agent.