Increasing muscling in your herd can substantially improve returns…

Increasing muscling in your herd can substantially improve returns without compromising growth, feed efficiency or any reproductive traits, recent research has found.

According to an MLA and Beef CRC-funded project, for each unit of improvement in muscle score (eg D to C), producers can expect a 15–21¢/kg increase in price received at live cattle sales.

Research Officer, Dr Linda Cafe, said the past two years of work, which also utilised 15 years of prior data from the NSW Department of Primary Industries' Angus muscling herd, has dispelled the myth that increased muscling in a herd will have negative impacts on cow performance traits such as calving ease and milk production.

"We compared cows selected for high or low visual muscle score. The cows in the high muscling line were similar in weight, slightly smaller in frame score and had more muscle and less subcutaneous fat than cows in the low muscling line," she said.

"These differences in body composition have not led to any difference in reproductive performance, with high muscling cows showing no difference in calving rates or calving ease, and producing weaned calves of similar weight to those of the low muscled cows."

The research also found that progeny from the high muscling line had similar feedlot growth rates to those from the low muscling line but improved feed efficiency, larger eye muscle area (EMA) and more retail meat yield.

However, Linda said care should be taken using extreme muscling genes, for example the myostatin (a growth factor which leads to double muscling) gene.

"During the study a third line of cows carrying one copy of a myostatin gene had the same performance as high muscled cows on moderate to good nutrition but their performance was reduced after 18 months on low nutrition," she said.

The project will run for a further two years.

Courtesy of MLA website