

TLC helps preemie grow into fair's champion feeder steer

By Amy Smith, Union staff writer | Posted: Monday, July 14, 2014 10:16 am

JEFFERSON — An unexpected entry took home the title of champion beef feeder cattle at the 2014 Jefferson County Fair.

Born one month too early, Trevor Messmer's calf, Laverne, shouldn't have lived past the first night.

"A month early they don't usually make it," said Trevor's father, Dave Messmer. "The first night we didn't think it would make it, but at five in the morning we heard a beller, and we looked downstairs and the thing was standing up. Low and behold he was still alive."

Laverne, or Verny as Trevor calls him, was born in the dead of winter on Jan. 21. Because of the cold, the Messmer family kept the calf in their basement for four days. The calf spent another four of five days in a heated shop before it was moved outside.

The calf weighed 65 pounds after it was born, and had undeveloped lungs and hooves. A veterinarian gave Laverne two shots — one to help develop his lungs and another to increase his heart rate.

For the first few days, Trevor bottle-fed Laverne milk replacer and spent time watching television with the calf in the basement.

Dave was leery at first to let Trevor name the calf for fear he wouldn't make it, but after several days Trevor decided upon the name Laverne after his tractor safety instructor LaVern Georgeson. Trevor just was finishing the safety course when the calf was born.

The calf continued to be bottle-fed even after he was reunited with the other animals because his mother would not take him back.

"When they are taken away, they (the mother) think they're dead," Dave said.

Laverne now resides in the horse barn because he never became acclimated with the other cattle.

Dave believes the calf was born so early because of the severely cold winter.

"You don't wish for your calves to be born early because they usually don't have a chance," Dave said.

If a calf is born any earlier than a month, they cannot survive.

Laverne is a red Hereford calf, weighing about 350 to 400 pounds.

Qualifications for feeder beef cattle champion are not so easy to come by and mostly are about genetics, according to Dave.



CHAMPION BEEF FEEDER

Trevor Messmer, of Lake Mills, was champion beef feeder winner with his calf Laverne, which was born one month early in January

“It’s not like any calf can be a champ feeder,” he said. “It’s a genetic thing.”

The animals are judged based on structural soundness, muscle build and the structure of the ribcage.

Judges look at how an animal’s legs move, so that when it grows up it can carry its weight without joint problems, Dave indicated.

They also look to see how muscular an animal’s rump is and whether it has more meat or fat.

The structure of the ribcage is important to judges because it is important for an animal to have a large lung capacity and bolder rib cage to process food.

“The more they eat, the faster they grow,” Dave added.

Laverne was rated by judges as choice even and would sell for \$1.50 per pound, according to the Milwaukee Stock Yard.

The calf was too young to be sold at auction and probably will be too old to show in next year’s fair, Dave said.

Bulls usually are kept on the farm for about 14 to 15 months before they are butchered — something the Messmers are not quite ready to think about.

“He’s a pretty special calf,” Dave said. “You can’t have one in your basement and not get attached.”

Trevor is a member of the Rock Lake Troopers and has shown animals in the Jefferson County Fair for five years. He has shown chickens, hogs, cattle, duck and pigeons.

This year, Trevor entered two steers, a cow, a calf, chickens, ducks and pigeons.

He was a junior champion in the duck competition, reserved champion with pigeons, and also won the award for best breed and owned beef feeder under a year.