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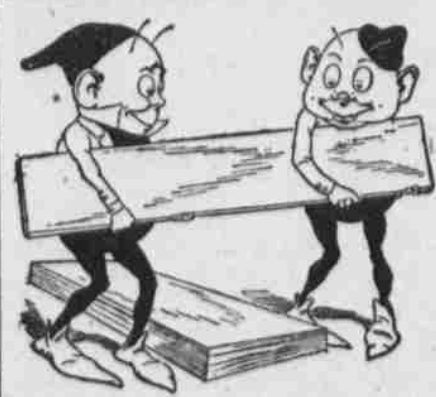
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Home Course In Live Stock Farming

XVI.—Feeding Beef Cattle.

By C. V. GREGORY,
Author of "Home Course in Modern
Agriculture," "Making Money on
the Farm," Etc.

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THERE are two general methods of making beef. The first consists in crowding the calves from birth until they are about eighteen months of age, when they are marketed as baby beef. The other method is to buy up young stuff, feed it for a few months and sell it for what it will bring. The bulk of these feeders is bought in the fall as two-year-olds and fed through the winter. Some are bought as yearlings and kept a year on rough feed and pasture before they are put into the feed lot.

Baby Beef.

With the lessening size of the ranges and consequent smaller supply of western feeders, it is becoming more necessary for the farmer to raise his own cattle. Where this is done it will usually be most profitable to sell them as baby beef, thus avoiding the expense of keeping them until three years old. Good dual purpose cows are usually used to produce baby beef animals, since it is too often a losing proposition to keep a cow a year for the calf alone. Where the calves are being raised for breeding purposes and

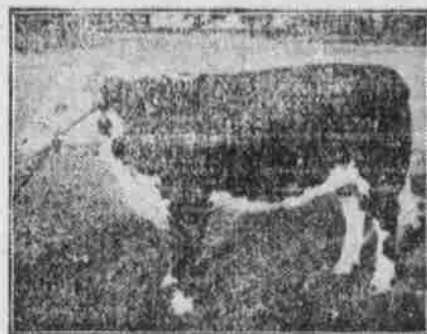


FIG. XXX.—GOOD HEREFORD STEER.

sell for a substantial advance over market prices they may be allowed to run with their mothers and live on new milk. This is too expensive a feed for beef calves, however. As soon as the calf is a week old it should be gradually changed from whole to skim milk, according to the plan given in article 8. As soon as possible the calves should be taught to eat shelled corn, with perhaps a few oats mixed with it. With clover or alfalfa for roughage, shelled corn alone does very well. The calves should be given all the rough feed they will eat, as by developing a large capacity when young greater gains can be obtained later.

From the standpoint of milk production it is best to have the calves come in the fall, but if cheap gains on the calves is the main point sought spring calving is preferable. In this way the calves will have to be kept through but one winter, and two summers of cheap gains on grass can be obtained. If the calves come in the spring they should be turned on grass as soon as possible. A shady pasture, with an occasional spraying for flies when they are bad, will add to the gains. Some grain should be fed all summer, the amount being controlled largely by the price. Heavy grain feeding increases the rate of gain, but adds to the cost. Grain feeding should continue throughout the winter, with the addition of plenty of clover or alfalfa hay and a little silage or roots, if such feed can be had.

One of the best ways to feed to corn at this time is to snap it and run it through a slicer. There is a freshness about snapped corn that makes the cattle relish it a great deal more than do corn that has been husked. The feeding value of the husks amounts to considerable too. A little oil or cottonseed meal added to the ration will cheapen the cost of gain if corn is high in price. The most rapid gains are made where alfalfa or clover forms the only roughage, fed at the rate of about three pounds of hay to one of corn. Adding a little cheaper roughage reduces the cost of gain, however. Part of the clover may be replaced to advantage by silage.

The feed given should be liberal, as calves tend to grow rather than to fatten. This tendency is specially evident in calves of "scrub" ancestry. The feeder should endeavor to make them grow and fatten at the same time, never losing the "calf fat." During the early part of the second summer, while the grass is at its best, the grain feeding may slacken somewhat, but should be increased again after a month or so until the calves are getting all they will clean up. The proper time to market will depend largely upon the price and the finish of the cattle. A little extra finish adds considerably to the price.

In experiments that have been carried on to determine the relative cost of gain it has been found that gains can be put on yearlings from 25 to 30 per cent cheaper than on two-year-olds. Objection is sometimes made to baby beef raising on the ground that the cheap roughage, such as cornstalks and straw, cannot be disposed of in this way. This is true, but the cows will use a large part of this feed, and the rest can be turned into bedding and used to swell the size of the manure pile. There are some advantages

in feeding older cattle, however. They gain faster and more uniformly and put on a better finish.

Feeding Older Cattle.

Where two-year-olds are to be fed they must usually be purchased. Occasionally a few can be picked up in the neighborhood, but if any number are wanted they will have to be bought on the general market. In order to make a profit in feeding there must be a margin between the cost of feeders and the selling price of fat animals. It the fat steer is for \$1 a hundred-weight more than he was bought for, each hundred pounds of his original weight has been increased in value \$1. It is in this way that most of the profit in feeding is obtained.

Buying feeding cattle right is one of the most important factors to success in the cattle business. Large cattle can be safely purchased on a narrower margin than lighter ones, since there is more weight to be increased in value. For instance, a margin of \$1 on a 700 pound steer would mean an increase in value of \$7. On a 1,200 pound steer the margin would need to be only 60 cents to produce the same amount. Another general principle is that the lower the price at which the feeders are bought the greater must be the margin. Of course the margin in any case can be only estimated, since the selling price cannot be foretold to a certainty in advance.

In selecting feeder steers there are a number of points to be kept in mind. One of the most important of these is uniformity. A bunch of steers that are uniform as to size and quality will feed better together and bring a better price when fattened. The feeders should come as near the beef type as possible—short face and neck, deep body, well sprung ribs, broad back, straight top and under line, long rump, fairly short legs. The steer with a sway back or flat ribs should be avoided. A sway back will never become thickly covered with flesh, and a narrow one cannot carry as much meat as a wide one. Since this is where the highest priced meat is found, this point will be an important one. In addition to this, the steers should have good constitution and large digestive capacity without being paunchy. Too large a paunch lessens the percentage of dressed beef that the animal will kill out, while a steer that is "tucked up" in the flank will never make good gains. If any of the cattle have horns they should be dehorned at once after getting them home.

The usual method of getting cattle on feed is to hurry the process as much as possible, getting them on full feed within fifteen to thirty days from the time they were first put into the feed lot. Where the cattle are to be on feed but a short time, say ninety days, this is undoubtedly the best method. It is not economical, however. Larger amounts of grain will be used with less roughage. The gains grow smaller toward the end of the feeding period, as the cattle begin to tire of the heavy rations. Where this plan is followed the safest plan is to chaff the hay with a feed cutter and mix the grain with it. Some oilmeal should be used to balance the corn.

A more profitable plan usually is to start in more slowly, taking as long as sixty days to get the cattle on full feed. The main feed during this preliminary period and much of the later period as well may be snapped corn. Considerable silage may be fed to advantage during the first part of the feeding period. If fed silage during the finishing period they will not smooth up as well, ship as well or sell as well.

This plan of using a lighter grain ration and a longer feeding period produces cheaper gains down to a certain point. By the end of sixty days the cattle should be on full feed and should receive nearly all they will clean up from that time on. They are in better shape to stand crowding than if they had been pushed from the start and will continue to make satisfactory gains up to the end of the feeding period. Some oil or cottonseed meal should be given during the last thirty days, as if not only cheapens the cost of gain, but also adds to the finish. Where there are hogs following cattle, grinding feed will seldom pay, with the possible exception of the last two or three weeks.

Experiments in feeding for a long period compared as to profits with feeding for a short period have shown that if roughage be relatively more plentiful and cheaper than meat then the "long feed" is the more profitable.



FIG. XXXI.—GOOD ANGUS STEER.

but where meat is plentiful and roughage scarce then the "short feed" is likely to be more profitable.

Experiments in feeding lots of an inferior class of steer in comparison with lots of a medium class of steer and lots of a superior class of steer go to show that the superior class give greater returns for feed fed, make greater gains in a given time and sell for a higher price than do the inferior class.

Feeding steers twice a day rather than more frequently has been found advisable. Feeding a succulent ration has been found to be cheaper and more wholesome than an all dry feed ration. Mixing roughage and meat seems to give better results than feeding them separately.

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