Feed Steers on Your Farm

Prepared by C. C. Mast, Department of Animal Husbandry

STEERS

Steers have been produced in Virginia from the very beginning of our country. They offer a means of selling grass, forage, and grain, and represent the final live product of the beef business. In the last decade, much emphasis has been placed on cow herds, but now many farmers find that steers fit their farm operation better. Farmers are taking a new interest in this phase of the cattle business.

Advantages

(1) Steers fit small farms where only a few cattle are needed, as well as large operations.
(2) Numbers can be adjusted easily to the available feed supply.
(3) Steers are not subject to as many diseases as cows.
(4) Steers fit an intensified livestock business.

Disadvantages

(1) Steers require an annual expenditure of capital for restocking.
(2) Raising steers is more speculative than maintaining cows.
(3) Steers do not tolerate short periods of feed shortage as well as cows, and they require higher quality feed and grass.

PRODUCTION METHODS

Finished steers are produced by several methods, depending on the grass and grain grown on a particular farm. These methods are as follows:

FULL FEEDING CALVES FROM WEANING TILL MARKET TIME THE FOLLOWING YEAR.

Procedure

(1) Purchase calves, either heifers or steers, in the fall and start immediately on feed.
(2) Feed high energy rations for an early market, or corn silage and 1% body weight of corn for a long feed of 8 to 11 months.
(3) Sell from May till September or whenever price and market conditions merit selling.
FEEDING YEARLING CATTLE

Procedure
Buy calves, graze one season, and finish with grain in dry lot.

(1) Purchase choice and good feeder calves in September and October. Winter on roughage and grain with cattle gaining 1 lb. daily.

(2) Graze on good pasture for full season, then full feed. If pasture gets short at any time, start on full feed immediately.

(3) Full feed on grain, hay, and/or silage until the grade of choice is reached.

Alternate Plan
Purchase yearling cattle in the fall and start on full feed in the feedlot. Use a full feed of grain, hay, or silage, depending on the type of market cattle are being fed for. Good quality cattle will usually require a comparatively heavy grain ration for best results. Low quality cattle may be finished profitably at lower grades on silage.

BUYING CALVES OR YEARLINGS IN THE FALL AND FINISHING BY FEEDING GRAIN THE FOLLOWING SUMMER.

Procedure
(1) Purchase choice and good heavy calves or yearlings in the fall.

(2) Winter to gain 1¼ pounds per day.

(3) After middle June full feed grain on pasture and sell when pasture supply and markets dictate.

GRASS FINISHING: Cattle must be 2-year-olds or older for grass finishing to be satisfactory. To reduce risk, most grass finishers buy calves and grow them out. Cool climate and excellent grass are needed.

Procedure
(1) Purchase choice or good feeder calves in September and October.

(2) Winter on roughage and some grain to gain ³⁄₄ to 1 lb. daily.

(3) Graze through one pasture season.

(4) Winter feed second winter so yearlings will gain at least 1¼ lbs. per day with roughage and grain.

(5) Graze the second summer on best grass available and sell from July to October, depending on the condition of the cattle and the market.

WINTERING RATIONS

400 lb. calves to gain 1¼ lbs. daily
- 30 lbs. corn silage
  3 lbs. grain
  1 lb. protein supplement or
- 15 lbs. corn silage
  5 lbs. hay
  3 lbs. grain
  1 lb. protein supplement or
- 12 lbs. mixed hay
  3 lbs. grain
  1 lb. protein supplement

400 lb. calves to gain ¾ lb. daily
- 25 lbs. silage
  1 lb. grain
  1 lb. protein supplement or
- 15 lbs. silage
  4 lbs. hay
  1 lb. grain
  1 lb. protein supplement or
- 10 lbs. mixed hay
  1 lb. grain
  1 lb. protein supplement

Note: Excellent quality hay and silage should be used for calves. Where forage quality is poor, more grain must be used to get desired results. Grain used can be either corn, barley, oats, or sorghum. Heavier calves must receive proportionately more.

800 lb. yearlings to gain 1¼ lbs. daily
- 40 lbs. corn silage
  4 lbs. grain
  1½ lbs. protein supplement or
- 25 lbs. corn silage
  6 lbs. hay
  4 lbs. grain
  1 lb. protein supplement or
- 16 lbs. hay
  4 lbs. grain
  1 lb. protein supplement

Cattle marketed as yearlings have to be wintered better than those sold at an older age.
FATTENING RATIONS

Calves 500 lbs.—900 lbs.

- 15 lbs. corn and cob meal
  4 lbs. hay or 10 lb. silage
  11/2 lbs. protein supplement

Calves 500 lbs.—1,000 lbs.

(low energy, long feeding period)

- 25 lbs. corn silage
  2 lbs. hay
  8 lbs. corn and cob meal
  2 lbs. protein supplement

Yearlings 700 lbs.—1,000 lbs.

- 20 lbs. corn silage
  17 lbs. corn and cob meal
  2 lbs. protein supplement or

- 15 lbs. silage
  2 lbs. hay
  17 lbs. corn and cob meal
  2 lbs. protein supplement or

- 7 lbs. mixed hay
  17 lbs. corn and cob meal
  11/2 lbs. protein supplement or

- (low energy long feeding period)
  35 lbs. corn silage
  2 lbs. hay
  8 lbs. corn and cob meal
  2 lbs. protein supplement

700 lbs.—1,000 lbs.

(For low quality cattle to be sold at low grade)

- 45 lbs. corn silage
  2 lbs. hay
  2 lbs. corn
  2 lbs. protein supplement

(1) In the Holland experiments, peanut vine hay has proven to be excellent feed for both wintering and fattening rations. Use it as you would any legume hay.

(2) Ground peanut hulls have been used successfully to replace hay in fattening rations. Don’t exceed 40% in the ration.

(3) Grinding hay and grain together and feeding in bunkers or on silage has given excellent results at the Agricultural Experiment Station, V. P. I.

FEEDING

The eye of the master fattens his cattle. No recommended ration will be exact for all lots of steers, so check winter gains with scales where possible and feed according to the response of your cattle.

Calves to be finished as yearlings should gain more than calves to be finished as 2-year-olds. Yearlings to be sold off grass at 2 yrs. should be wintered at a high level so as to obtain a good finish on grass.

Produce all feed used except protein supplement.

GRAZING

Don’t overgraze. Overgrazing lowers carcass value of grass steers and requires more grain and time to finish fed steers. Cattle destined for grain finishing should be started on feed immediately if grass gets short. In grass operations, let the 2-year-old cattle have the best grazing.

PARASITE CONTROL

(1) Worm calves at buying time. Use phenothiazine as follows: Mix 11/2 pints of hot water per pound of powder.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Size of Animal</th>
<th>Phenothiazine Powder</th>
<th>Drench</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>400 lbs.</td>
<td>2 oz.</td>
<td>4 oz.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>500 lbs.</td>
<td>2 1/2 oz.</td>
<td>5 oz.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>800 lbs.</td>
<td>2 2/3 oz.</td>
<td>6 oz.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(2) Control lice by spraying thoroughly in the fall with Malathion, Toxaphene, or Co-Ral. Repeat if needed in late winter. Follow directions for mixing on the container.

(3) Grubs can be controlled by spraying with Co-Ral or by use of one of the other systemic type materials in September and October. Use according to directions on container.

(4) Flies and mosquitoes can be controlled by using Malathion, Methoxychlor, or Toxaphene. Follow directions on the container carefully when using any of the materials as to spray strength and time elapse before slaughter.

(5) Horn flies can be controlled with back rubbers saturated with a 5% solution of toxaphene or Methoxychlor.
BUYING

(1) Buy healthy, well-bred calves weighing from 400 to 600 lbs. Use nothing below good grade feeders. Closely graded calves are best. If they are not all the same size, sort into size groups for winter feeding. Buy healthy yearlings of a quality to suit market and available feed. Buy fleshy cattle for short feed or thin for long feeding periods. Low grade cattle are good only for cheap markets and cheap feed. Remember, poor quality cattle are hard to fatten at an early age.

(2) Buy carefully. Well-bought cattle usually result in well-sold cattle. If you are handling grass cattle, buy after you have sold your finished steers. If you are feeding yearlings, buy as close to selling time as possible and watch market trends. Always try to have margin between finished cattle and replacements.

MARKETING

(1) Investigate all available marketing sources before selling. Auction markets, terminal markets, special sales, and selling direct to packer buyers offer possibilities.

(2) Sell grain finished cattle generally when they will grade choice. Top out cattle as they are ready. Sell grass cattle when they reach their peak of finish or earlier if market conditions justify.

(3) But, don't be strictly bound to any market time or grade. Sell whenever a good opportunity presents itself. There is more virtue in selling a good grade steer at a profit than a prime steer at a loss.