

Who in the World Wants American Beef?

Our topics for this week are

- **World consumption of beef**
- **Factors adverse to American exports of beef**
- **An alternative to beef from feedlots**

Who wants beef? Ginger and I do. Most Americans do. Americans eat 56 pounds per capita per year. It is nutritious and part of our heritage. Without cattle, we would not have cowboys. It is even in our genes. Just look at your canine teeth. They developed for meat eating and have little to nothing to do with fruits or vegetables. Our incisor and molar teeth can handle those.

However, the USA is not the top exporter of beef in the world, in part, because over 75% of cattle in the U.S. are moved to feedlots after being weaned. This is not always been the case. Cattle feedlots appeared during World War II and had rapid growth beginning in the 1960s. Brazil and Australia export more beef than the U.S. Brazil exports twice as much the U.S. Other leaders in beef exports are Argentina and Canada.

The European Union and Australia restrict U.S. imports because of concerns over food safety, animal welfare, and the use of growth promoting drugs in feedlots. Most countries that import U.S. beef are Asian.

Chief among EU concerns over American feedlot beef are the use of ractopamine, a beta adrenoreceptor agonist administered to promote growth. Ractopamine is banned in over 160 countries over concerns about effects on human health and animal welfare. Monensin is another drug used in feedlot cattle to prevent bloat and treat coccidiosis. It is very hazardous if ingested by horses. The median lethal dose in horses is 1/100 that of cattle.

Other concerns about feedlots include alteration of microbes in cattle, especially those with antibiotic resistance and those that cause respiratory disease. Genetic diversity in cattle is endangered by a small range of breeds in feedlots and increased inbreeding. Loss of genetic diversity increases the risk of impaired immunity to disease and resilience to stress in feedlot cattle. Feedlot cattle are fed grains such as corn and soybeans and do not graze grass. Thirty-five percent of U.S. feedlots have the capacity for 50,000 head of cattle, or more, and the number of mega-feedlots is growing. Feedlots are concentrated in smaller areas than pasture-fed cattle, more land has to be devoted to grain production for feedlots which drive up costs of grain and reduce sustainability.

The Alternative to Feedlots

Should this concern you, buying locally raised grass-fed beef is still an option. Although the cost is higher and since the cattle are not fed high amounts of grain and are allowed more exercise than feedlot cattle, the beef may not be as juicy or tender. On the other hand, grass-fed beef is often higher in vitamins A and E and antioxidants. It has less fat, less calorie density, and higher levels of omega-3 fatty acids. Growth enhancing drugs are not used in grass-fed cattle. The adverse environmental impact is also much less with grass-fed operations.

The Loss of Skills in Handling Cattle

It is important to note that more than 95% of the U.S. population is 3 or more generations removed from raising cattle. This the primary reason that large animal veterinary medicine has the greatest shortage of veterinarians. It is our hope that efforts to maintain good animal handling of cattle, as in Better Animal Handling, will help pass on skills needed to provide good animal welfare, better environmental protections, and a more sustainable source of high quality, unadulterated American beef.

If you have comments or you're interested in particular animal handling subjects, contact us at CBC@BetterAnimalHandling.com

Now let's recap the key points to remember from today's episode:

- 1. Grass-fed beef production is more sustainable than feedlot feeding of beef.**
- 2. The use of growth-promoting drugs in American feedlot cattle has a negative effect on the number of countries that the U.S. can export beef to.**
- 3. The number of Americans who know how to handle cattle in sustainable situations is continuing to dwindle.**

More information on animal handling can be found in my books, *Animal Handling and Physical Restraint*, *Concise Textbook of Small Animal Handling*, and *Concise Textbook of Large Animal Handling* all published by CRC Press and available on Amazon and from many other fine book supply sources.

Additional information is provided at: www.betteranimalhandling.com . This website has more than 350 past podcasts with notes on handling of dogs, cats, other small mammals, birds, reptiles, horses, cattle, small ruminants, swine, and poultry.

Don't forget, serious injury or death can result from handling and restraining some animals. Safe and effective handling and restraint requires experience and continual practice. Acquisition of the needed skills should be under the supervision of an experienced animal handler.