

Today's episode is on:

The Best Growing Practice for Beef Cattle

Our topics for this week are:

- **Feedlots Compared to Grass-Fed Cattle**
- **Consolidation of Beef Processing in the U.S.**
- **Certification of Grass-Fed Cattle**

The best growing practice for beef cattle depends on the goal of raising cattle. Some people are focused on raising cattle as fast as possible for the greatest profit possible. These people also proclaim that the U.S. must feed the world while inferring providing beef is necessary to means to do so. Others are primarily interested in raising cattle in the most feasible humane, ways until a humane slaughter. This group is generally more interested in the quality of nutrition in beef created in the beef production method.

Other issues in beef production are the effect on the environment and the quantity of land needed.

About 85% of all beef production in the U.S. involves feedlots with more than 1,000 head. At around 500 lb. in weight, calves are sent to feedlots to be fed grain with supplements in great quantities (more than 30% of their diet) to speed weight gain, especially in fat, for 200 days. Feedlots are a form of Concentrated Feeding Operations (CAFOs) used to speed the growth of livestock and reduce costs. Due to the stress of the diet and close confinement of young cattle from various cow-calf producers, diseases requiring antibiotics are more frequently than in cattle kept on pasture.

The use of small family owned feedlots began in the 1940s in the U.S. By the early 1960s, feedlots had become large corporate owned operations.

The other, older and more expensive method of raising cattle is on pasture until time of slaughter.

In the 1980s, large meatpackers began buying out owners of feedlots. Today 74% of beef production in the U.S. is controlled by four companies: Tyson, JHS, Cargill, and National Beef. JHS, a Brazilian-owned company, who bought out Swift in the U.S., is the largest beef company in the world. Marfrig, who owns National Beef, is also a Brazilian company and is the 4th

largest beef producer in the world. In 2015, Congress repealed mandatory country of origin labeling of beef. In addition, the USDA allows foreign produced beef to be repackaged in the U.S. and labeled as a product of the U.S.

Cattle raised in feedlots are much more likely than pasture fed cattle to cause groundwater contamination with cow manure, create air pollution, and need antibiotics occurring in beef products. Many feedlots have concrete pads which can cause lameness and skin injuries, and uncovered grassless dirt lots which become mud pits in wet weather, and insufficient shade for hot weather.

Grass-fed cattle spread their urine and manure over a larger area, reducing adverse environmental impact. Grass covered areas with less traffic than feedlots do not become mud pits. Most pastures, especially in the Midwest, have sufficient shade from trees and sheds to be more than sufficient shade from the sun.

Several nutritional benefits are associated with grass-fed beef. Grass-fed beef has less fat and therefore fewer calories, higher levels of conjugated linolenic acid which is believed to reduce the risks of some forms of cancer, higher amounts of omega-3 fatty acids which decreases inflammation, and less bacteria compared to feedlot-fed beef.

One problem with “grass-fed beef” is that any cattle that have fed on grass can be labeled as grass-fed. However the American Grassfed Association has a process that ensures beef it certifies beef that comes from cattle without close confinement or high grain diets. More information is available at: <https://www.americangrassfed.org/>

Abby and I like to eat beef. We eat steak once per week. We have some concern about the control of beef prices by four companies, two of which are foreign and by buying foreign grown beef products that are labeled as a product of the U.S. However, our focus is on whether animals are handled safely and humanely. When we compare the living conditions for feedlot cattle to that of cattle on pasture, there are striking differences. Humane handling is based on the 1965 Brambell Report by the World Organization of Animal Health.

The five basic needs of domesticated animals according to the Brambell Report, were:

1. A suitable environment
2. A suitable diet
3. The ability to exhibit normal behavior
4. To be housed with, or apart from, other animals
5. To be protected from pain, suffering, injury, and disease

In our opinion, it is clear that raising cattle on pasture is the best method of handling cattle. However, to be true to our principles, we must pay more for beef and possibly eat it less often.

We think that is a small price to pay for being more humane to cattle and having a safer source of beef that contributes directly to our nation's economy.

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

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

- 1. Grass-fed cattle live a life with more of the 5 basic needs of animals than do feedlot cattle.**
- 2. Foreign raised beef can be repackaged and sold in the U.S. as a U.S. product.**
- 3. The American Grassfed Association certifies beef as being produced without excessive confinement or high-grain diets.**

More information on animal handling is available in my book, *Animal Handling and Physical Restraint*, published by CRC Press. It is also available on Amazon and from many other fine book supply sources.

Additional information is available at: www.betteranimalhandling.com

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.