

## FACT SHEET: Feedlot Finishing Cattle

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| <p><b>Background</b></p>                   | <p>Beef producers have finished cattle by feeding a high-energy grain diet for more than 100 years. Researchers have found that cattle fed rations of grain and crop surpluses produce better tasting beef.</p> <p>Cattle feeding became more prevalent after World War I and the Great Depression but was not fully developed on a commercial scale until after World War II when grain was plentiful, the economy was robust and consumers demanded tender, tasteful beef year-round. Beef producers found by finishing cattle uniformly, it was possible to reduce costs and provide a high-quality product to consumers.</p> <p>Today, most U.S. cattle feeding operations are small, with fewer than 1,000 head of cattle. However, the 5 percent of operations with more than 1,000 head finish more than 80 percent of fed cattle.</p> <p>U.S. grain-fed beef has earned a worldwide reputation for its quality, consistency and taste. Taste tests have shown that its tenderness and rich flavor are important to consumers. In fact, consumers will go out of their way to select beef cuts with these grain-fed characteristics.</p>  |
| <p><b>The Cattle Feeding Process</b></p>   | <p>Cattle are raised on pasture land for most of their lives (usually for 12-18 months) then transported to a feedlot for finishing. Cattle usually spend four to six months in a feedlot, during which time they gain 2.5 to 4 pounds per day. The cattle are fed a scientifically formulated ration of 70 percent to 90 percent concentrate. Concentrates may be grain such as corn or barley, or they can be high energy, high fiber co-products that result from processing grains for human use. For example, soybean hulls are a co-product that is left after soy oil is removed from soybeans. On this special diet, cattle gain about 1 pound for every 6 pounds of feed they consume.</p> <p>In the feedlot, cattle live in pens with 100 to 125 other animals and provide approximately 125 to 250 square feet per animal. Each animal has about 1 foot of space at the feed bunk during feeding, which normally takes place twice daily. Cattle have constant access to water in the feedlot.</p> <p>The abundance of feed corn in the U.S. contributes to the economic viability of producing grain-fed cattle. In fact, it often costs more to raise cattle on pasture because it takes longer for the animals to reach market weight. Thus, grass-finished beef tends to be more expensive than grain-fed beef.</p> <p>Many cattle in feedlots are given growth promotants that contain hormones, like estrogen, which is naturally found in both plants and animals. In fact, these hormones are produced by the human body in amounts hundreds of thousands times greater than quantities found in growth promotants for cattle. A woman, for example, produces about 480,000 nanograms of estrogen daily; while a 3-ounce serving of beef from an implanted steer contains just 1.9 nanograms (a nanogram is a billionth of a gram).</p> <p>Stringent government rules assure that no ruminant by-products are fed to cattle. This, along with careful processing methods, assures that bovine spongiform encephalopathy (BSE or "mad cow" disease) does not become an issue in the United States.</p> |
| <p><b>Feedlots and the Environment</b></p> | <p>Feedlot owners are very attentive to the environment. Odor, water quality, air quality and land utilization are all factors feedlots operators consider and manage constantly. For instance, if the ground becomes too dry, operators may use a sprinkler system to help keep the dust down.</p> <p>Windbreaks at the edge of a feedlot – fast growing trees or other types of vegetation – help keep dust and odors contained. Manure is removed from pens and may be processed for use on crop land as natural fertilizer. In Colorado alone, this type of natural fertilizer is worth about \$34.2 million a year.</p> <p>Cattle produce an insignificant amount of a greenhouse gas called methane. About 70 percent of methane emissions actually come from human-related activities such as burning petroleum, coal mining and oil and natural gas exploration and extraction. Oceans, wetlands, forests and rice fields are also sources of methane in the environment.</p>  |
| <p><b>Animal Welfare</b></p>               | <p>The feedlot setting keeps cattle safe, separated from predators and able to congregate with other animals in inclement weather. Death loss in feedlots is generally less than 1.5 percent, partially because cattle are monitored regularly for illness. Sick animals are removed from pens for treatment, and are provided individual care and attention.</p> <p>Beef producers recognize the importance of animal health and well-being, morally and economically. They know that well-nourished and content cattle gain weight rapidly and efficiently. They gladly accept the responsibility of being stewards of the land and protectors of the animals in their care.</p>   |

