

Growing Trend to Feeders Meeting Some Competition

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Cattle feeding is a growing industry. Its expansion has helped cattlemen to meet keen competition for the consumer market in this country.

Slaughter of steers increased by almost two-thirds between 1951 and 1957. This nearly equals the 80 per cent increase in broiler production during the same period. Actually, the volume of steer beef produced is still almost three times that of commercial broiler meat. It is double the volume of all chicken meat.

Cattle feeding is in its second period of fast growth. The first was in the late 1930's. Then volume nearly doubled. The present period began about 1950. As incomes increased after the war, consumers stepped up their demand for beef in general, and even more, their demand for the higher grades of beef from fed cattle.

Merchandising changes have contributed to stronger demand for U. S. Choice and U. S. Good beef. Recently, enthusiasm for grilling of beef outdoors has increased the demand for high grade beef also.

Another factor leading to more feeding has been a larger production and declining price for feed. After rising steadily the last few years, the feed harvest set a new record in 1957. Farmer's prices received for feed grains have generally declined since 1951. In November, they were the lowest since 1943.

Moreover, interest in cattle feeding is a typical feature of the peak supply phase of the cattle cycle. A shift from cow-and-calf operations to feeding was a big factor in the reduction of total cattle numbers that began during 1956 and is still going on.

Finally, cattle feeding has expanded because new technological methods have been used in it more extensively than in any other phase of raising or feeding meat animals. Examples are stilbestrol and use of mechanical feed dispensers in commercial feedlots.

Apart from its general increase, there have been three major changes in feeding operations.

First, feeding is no longer confined to the Corn Belt. It has expanded greatly in the West and is now growing in the South.

Since the early 1930's the western Corn Belt has increased its own inventory of cattle on feed 160 per cent. The eastern Corn Belt has done even better, doubling its inventory. But cattle on feed in the West now are 35 times more numerous than they were 25 years ago.

California now has seven times as many cattle on feed as it did in the early 1930's. Washington and Arizona six times as many. The West now accounts for a fourth of all cattle on feed on Jan. 1 and for an even larger per cent of annual marketings of fed cattle.

Second, the feeding period has been shortened. In this, the West has been in the forefront. Feeding in California is intensive and lasts only about 120 days. California cattle are fed to a slightly lower grade than Corn Belt cattle. Fewer reach high Choice or Prime.

California refills its feedlots twice during the year, Colorado once. The Corn Belt feeds a bit longer than formerly, but still will not average a complete second turnover during the year.

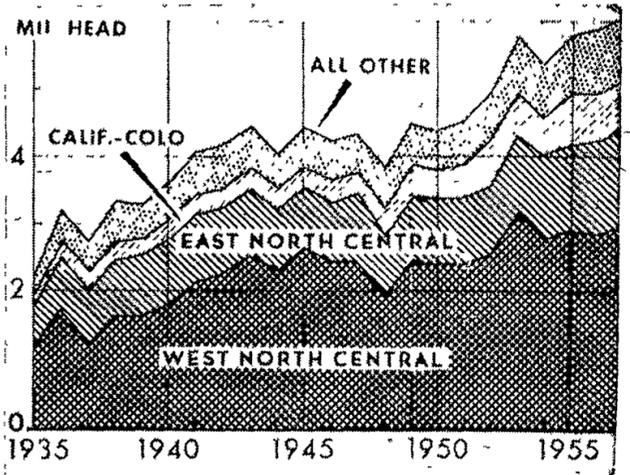
Third change is the emphasis on moderately high finish. Fewer coarse and underfinished cattle now go to slaughter and extreme high finish in cattle has become less popular as outlets for high Choice and Prime beef have shrunk. The range of high Good to middle Choice probably represents both current preference and the direction to which feeding has been going.

The big volume of feeding helped to lift total beef output to its 1956 record high and to keep it almost as large in 1957. This happened not only because of the extra weight to which fed cattle are carried, but also because it caused more calves to be retained for feeding instead of being slaughtered as calves.

In most past cycles, slaughter of calves increased sharply as total cattle numbers reached and passed their crest. In this cycle,

calf slaughter rose until 1954, but stayed almost stable afterward. In 1957, a third more steer than calves were slaughtered under Federal inspection. In 1947, fewer steers than calves went to slaughter.

As total cattle numbers are decreasing, declines in slaughter and beef output can be expected for several years. However, if cattle feeding stays large, it could prevent as much of a reduction as often occurs.



NOTE THE RAPID gain in cattle feeding numbers in the Western states since 1935. However west North Central states have held about even in the number of cattle on feed.

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