

Bull Beef Production Has Good Future

The maxim that bull beef is suitable only for canning or making bologna needs to be reconsidered, according to researchers at Beltsville, Md.

Not that beef from old bulls is suitable for anything more than that.

But the quality of lean bull beef from well-grown yearlings has been proved — and has consumer approval — in a number of state and USDA studies. And when managed like steers, the bulls have been outstanding in growth and economy of production.

Practically all bull beef — of any age — goes on the market today as processed beef. And although the market potential beyond this is not fully known, it must be re-examined on the basis of new information on bull feeding.

Weaning bulls of the beef breeds grew significantly faster and more efficiently than their twins raised as steers — in closely controlled feedlot trials conducted by ARS scientists E. J. Warwick, R. L. Hiner and R. E. Davis at Beltsville, Md. The bulls also showed up quite well in most carcass characteristics, although rating a little lower than the steers in tenderness and tastiness.

In these trials the bulls gained an average of 2.10 pounds and their steer twins 1.72 pounds per day. They ate just a little over 1 percent more feed than the steers but produced 21 percent more daily gain.

The bulls reached the

slaughter weight of 900 pounds at 15 months of age, the steers at about 17 months. Both groups went on controlled feeding when 6 months old.

The bulls required 7.97 pounds of feed, and the steers 9.50 pounds, to produce 1 pound of gain. This was a saving in feed of 16 to 17 percent. Stated another way, the bulls produced 1.19 pounds of beef for every pound the steers produced — on the same amount of feed.

The bulls were more economical of feedlot labor and capital, too. The steers were in the feedlot for 11 months, but the bulls reached slaughter weight in only 9 months — thus saving some 18 percent in feedlot labor and overhead cost.

The bulls were particularly efficient in putting on lean beef; they had 10 percent more lean in the ninth-to-eleventh rib section than the steers had. And the bull carcasses carried 38 percent less fat — largely waste — over the rib-eye area. However, the bulls had about 93 percent more bone in the rib section.

The bulls also compared well with the steers in the percent of desirable cuts in the carcass. Their rib eye averaged nearly one-fifth larger. And the bulls' forequarters were a little heavier, chiefly due to a heavier chuck and neck.

A taste panel rated bull beef slightly less flavorful and tender than steer meat, and the Warner-Bratzler shear test confirmed the tenderness difference. The steer beef was moderately marbled; the bull meat a little less so. The bull beef was also slightly darker.

The bull carcasses graded between high Good and low

Choice, the steer carcasses, middle Choice — all within the range that consumers consider desirable. The satisfactory quality rating of the bull beef is doubtless due partly to the bulls' rapid growth and youth when slaughtered. The meat had none of the objectionable flavor or other characteristics associated with meat from old bulls.

Similar results have been obtained at the agricultural experiment stations of Arkansas, Ohio, Pennsylvania, Nebraska, Tennessee, and Wyoming. The Ohio study also indicated that the male hormone and rogen produced in the

testis probably is responsible for the better performance of bulls.

The individual who ventures into feeding young bulls also needs more information on what markets will accept his product and how much — and at what prices. Buyers in some areas still discount young bulls heavily. And the producer needs much more information on production — best feeding plans, best market ages and weights, more breed information especially about dairy breeds, and whether bulls will react well under large feedlot conditions.

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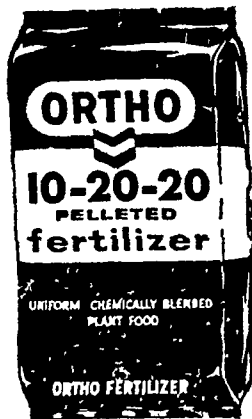
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