

Berks, Lebanon beef feeders hear market outlook

BY LAUREL SCHAEFFER
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MIDWAY — At present, the chances of feeding cattle, or any other livestock, for meat purposes profitably seems bleak. That was the outlook conveyed during the Berks-Lebanon Beef Feeders Meeting, held at the Midway Diner.

Lou Moore, Penn State Extension economist listed eleven "scary thoughts for beef producers" and discussed the present and past agricultural production records concerning beef feeders.

Moore explained how little retail meat prices have risen in the past year as compared to general food prices and disposable income. The latter two climbing about ten percent per year compared to approximately three percent in meat prices.

Per capita beef consumption has also dropped from a high in 1976 of 129 pounds to 106 pounds in 1980.

"We eat all of the meat we produce in this country," Moore explained. "We ration what we produce with price." Illustrating this point, the economist noted consumption of beef in this period dropped 23 percent while beef prices rose 59 percent.

Beef producers are also competing with more pork and poultry producers because of the price spread between the different kinds of meat, Moore said. When pork was priced only a few cents less than beef, consumers bought a larger portion of beef. But, as the price spread increased to about one dollar, consumers were more apt to substitute more pork in their diets for beef.

Mentioning the cattle cycle, Moore stated under normal conditions, beef producers should be making a profit as cattle numbers are beginning to expand. Last year numbers increased 1 percent to 111 million head. This year cattle numbers are expected to increase



Louis Moore

3 percent to 115 million head. This expansion has not happened however, Moore stated, mainly because the price of grain has remained high and other production costs also have risen dramatically.

In looking at the prospects for feeding cattle profitably, Moore listed the following trends: the number of cattle on feed is dropping; the feeder supply is increasing; competitive meat production is dropping; production costs are rising, and prices are rising. Whether these factors could raise the price of fat cattle enough to be profitable, was not predicted by Moore, but he said it didn't look good.

Les Burdette, Penn State Extension beef specialist, discussed alternative feeds and least cost rations for fattening cattle.

The beef specialist explained the average Pennsylvania beef producer is also a farmer who doesn't always think about least cost rations as much as the large Midwest feedlot operators do. Feedlot operators usually don't keep large feed inventories on hand and can use computers to



Lester Burdette

calculate which rations are cheapest for them to feed, he observed.

Least cost rations provide the lowest total cost per unit of gain, Burdette explained. They should also meet the nutrient needs of the animal and keep them healthy.

The beef specialist gave comparative feeding value for several alternative feeds. On a weight basis barley has 95 percent of the feeding value of corn. Oats have 65 percent of corn's feeding value but is always over priced for fattening cattle, Burdette remarked. Mid-bloom alfalfa has 32 percent of corn's feeding value, wheat has 100 percent, and molasses has 70 percent.

Burdette recommended selling raw harvested soybeans and buying supplement rather than feeding the beans.

He also advised coarsely ground feed, noting there is a larger problem with feed intake in finely ground grain because of dust, etc. *Even though farmers don't want to see corn kernels in cattle manure, it doesn't mean finely ground corn isn't there too,* he commented.

Burdette remarked how the feed additive Rumensin increases feed efficiency about ten percent by decreasing feed intake of cattle without reducing weight gains. This growth stimulator, marketed by Lanco, is a methane inhibitor producing a more desirable fermentation in the rumen of a steer.

He recommended its use in fattening cattle over 500 pounds and cautioned beef feeders not to be alarmed if they notice their cattle reduced their feed intake 50 percent the first day.

"It's an unpalatable product and it takes cattle awhile to adjust to it," he explained.

Burdette also advised beef feeders not to start cattle on Rumensin if they are closer than 90 days to market.

Implants, antibiotics, vitamins, and minerals were recommended by the beef specialist. "On an average, most Pennsylvania farmers are deficient in at least one of these items," he noted.

Discussing alternate feeds, Burdette listed several energy sources which can be utilized such as potatoes, apples, brewer's grains; bakery wastes, candy, grain dust, damaged grains, fat and wood fines, which are wood fibers so short they can't be used for paper manufacturing.

The beef specialist recommended limiting the fat content of a ration to four percent and told the beef feeders present that potato chips usually contain between 30 and 35 percent fat.

Other recommendations included limiting the energy by-products to between 20 and 40 percent of a ration, mixing them well with other ration ingredients; being careful of the "keeping qualities" of the ingredients; limiting the fat as noted above; and mixing dusty materials with

most feeds.

Burdette cautioned the feeders that cattle fed high bulk and high moisture products may require a drying out period near the end of their feeding period of about 30 days so they lose their pot bellies, and look more appealing to cattle buyers.

The beef specialist discussed protein alternatives and recommended the use of urea or other non-protein-nitrogen products for cattle over 600 pounds. He told the area beef producers that urea added to corn silage will increase the bunk life of the silage by four or five hours in summer. If added to grain, it should be mixed well, he added. Other nitrogen sources cited were: anhydrous ammonia; brewer's and distiller's grains; milk by-products; and poultry litter.

Addressing the area beef producers were Kenny Rarick and Gerald Bowman, beef feeders using alternative feed ingredients.

Rarick, of Reading, is feeding apple pumice to replacement heifers supplemented with five pounds of hay and five pounds of grain per day. He noted he has been pleased with the cattle performance and recorded an average of 1.78 pounds of gain per day.

It was noted other feeders using apple pumice found it hard on equipment, and storability was very poor.

Burdette commented apple pumice has a TDN value of about 65 percent. If costs are below twenty dollars per ton, including hauling, it would have a place as a feed alternative, he said. But costs above twenty dollars would make silage a better choice. Burdette warned apple pumice supplemented with NPN should not be fed to brood cows because ab-

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