

# Beef Economist Predicts

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"You think the packer is your enemy, that the packer never loses while you lose money. But the packer doesn't always make money. The packer has had some troubles also."

## Consistency is problem

Henning says that consistency is a big problem with the industry. Quality standards — including quality feed, care, uniform cattle, and breeds, in addition to packer specifications — must be strived for.

"Our beef in the East is every bit as good as western cattle," he said. "The cattle here go to the market sooner than out West. But more beef here comes here from western packers."

Henning also moderated a panel, which included Vernon Trueth from J. W. Trueth & Sons; Mike Silverburg from Moyer Packing Company; Tom Taylor from Taylor Packing Co., Inc.; and Taylor Packing consultant Jerry Simmons.

The panel spoke about the industry and the problems the producer often has in working with meat packers.

## 'Energy-dense' diet

The key to bringing up cattle and getting the best price is a more "energy-dense" diet, said Dr. John Comerford, Penn State extension beef specialist at the meeting.

Corn silage provides the best weight gains for cattle up to 800 pounds, much better than alfalfa or haylage. Studies by Penn State indicate that fish meal or alfalfa can change protein absorption rates and provide more energy meal for the growing calf.

The Penn State studies compared Holstein and crossbred beef steers for feedlot performance and carcass traits. The researchers compared corn silage and alfalfa haylage as forage sources in the diet of feedlot steers. Soybeans and fishmeal were compared as protein sources in the diet of feedlot steers. The differences between Holstein and crossbred beef were compared with the different diets.

Forty percent forage was provided until the calves reached 800 pounds. During the first two years, 30 head were monitored for feed intake, including what they ate and how much was eaten.

## Aiming for choice grade

The researchers were aiming for 75 percent choice grade. The endpoint was 0.4 inches of backfat using ultrasound. About 0.25 inches of fat yields the choice grade.

"Protein sources work up to 800 pounds," he said, with silage averaging 11 to 12 percent protein content. Fishmeal or soybean have been laboratory tested to show high protein content. But after 300 days on fishmeal, calves did not eat enough to gain enough to reach endpoint quickly.

However, soybean meal also proved high in protein. Roasted soybeans could also be fed to calves as a good source of weight-increasing protein.

"Feed your calves with a similar amount of feed after 800 pounds to get them to choice grade," Comerford said.

## 'Partying' detrimental

Karl Hess, a Lancaster veal cattle producer, believes it is the holiday "partying" that proves detrimental to newborn calves.

"Mortality has to deal with how much colostrum is fed to the calf

within the first 12 hours of birth. The first 4 to 12 hours are crucial," Hess said. "And the buyer has no control over that. The mortality of veal calves is higher during the holiday season because calf producers are out partying."

Hess has dealt with the "real-life" experience in his goals of providing the best mortality rate. His last newly purchased herd experienced about a 5 to 6 percent mortality rate.

For most farmers, he said, in November the rate can reach 20 percent.

## 420 head

Hess operates a farm with his family south of Lancaster. He raises about 420 head of cattle and 25 varieties of veal calves. His methods employ a calf barn (from birth to 8 weeks), a background barn (6 to 20 weeks), and a feedlot (16 to 20 weeks and to finish).

Calves are fed a liquid diet. "The feed is mixed in hot water with the best replacer I could get," he said. "The more nutrition you can give the calf, the better. You should provide the maximum nutrition with each swallow the animal takes."

Hess uses whole cereal dry shelled corn with a supplement pellet added to the backgrounding feed. The feedlot is outside of the barn and he uses a "mix or match" for the cattle, with about 30 percent feed forage and alfalfa haylage. The kernel corn is consumed readily by the cattle.

"This high-concentration diet is better than regular diet," he said.

## Consider newspaper

"Farmers should consider newspaper as a bedding option," said Tim Breneisen, from the Lancaster County Solid Waste Management Authority.

"The cost of using bedding should be based on convenience and how well it works," Breneisen said.

Using newspaper for bedding in a barn or feedlot is not new. Dairy farmers in Lancaster and York counties have been using newspaper as part of their bedding for many years, and the demand for material is strong.

"There is an awful lot of paper around," he said. Breneisen indicated that municipal Act 101 provides a basis for either recycling the paper or shredding it for bedding.

## Used successfully

"Newspaper for bedding can be used successfully if used proper-

ly," said Dan McFarland, Penn State agricultural engineer. "A York County farmer told me he was using newspaper for 40 years."

Newspaper is 10 times more absorbent than straw and 4 times as absorbant as dry sawdust beds. If farmers use it, however, only paper with black ink should be used. Color ink on newspaper should be used sparingly, and farmers should not use magazine paper because of its lack of absorbency. About 1 to 4 pounds should be used per head per day.

"Cardboard and telephone books have also worked well," said McFarland. "And the questions of health problems prove that there is more lead in vitamin pills than in newsprint. There is do danger of contamination to milk or meat."

McFarland said the only problem is the "litter" question. If the paper is shredded in too large a size, it will blow around. Farmers should shred the paper to about 1-inch squares. Straw should be applied first and newspaper should be mixed in, working from the back of the shed during the "still" times of day.

"In the field, newspaper mixed with manure decomposes quick-

ly," he said. "And the heavy metal content is lower than straw. The paper does not harm the soil's nutrient level."

A farmer should use a motorized bedding chopper, a big bale chopper, a forage harvester, or a hammermill to shred the paper, McFarland said.

## What's happening in industry

The purpose of the meetings is to "keep local cattle feeders in tune with what's happening in the industry on a national level," said Chester D. Hughes, livestock extension agent. "This is the only gathering of beef cattle feeders in the area."

Hughes said that farmers can attend the presentations to obtain useful information for beef feeding operations. "We provide a look into the future of the packing industry. A lot of packing information gives farmers an idea of their future — should they remodel, expand, or pull back the reins and wait."

As fast as the industry changes, many cattle feeders need the help and information the program provides. "If a small packing plant closes, it can affect the local market. A farmer should be provided with that kind of information."

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