

North Dakota Can Feed Calves to Finish

The situation

Old myths are hard to change – ‘North Dakota can’t finish cattle because it’s too cold. Cattle won’t finish and it will cost too much feed’. Adding value to livestock is important to North Dakota’s economy. Past research has shown cattle can be finished in North Dakota. Adoption of the cattle feeding business by producers is slow.

Extension response

A producer participatory project – the **Eastern Dakota Cattle Feedout** - was developed to allow cattle producers to experience cattle feeding with their own cattle. County extension staff recruited cattle consignments into the feedout by using brochures, posters, news releases and personal communication.

Each year, cattle were received prior to an evening cattle education program in Devils Lake and then transported to a Carrington, North Dakota feedlot for feeding until finished for harvest. Reports on cattle performance were shared periodically during the feeding period. At the end of each year’s feedout project, meetings were held to discuss results of the cattle feedout and answer questions.

Impacts

Spring born steer calves (474 head from 54 producers) were consigned to Pipestem Feeders in December of 2006 and 2007 and harvested in April-June 2007 and 2008. Profit was calculated for each calf and reported by herd. The average per head profit for all calves was \$60.36. In 2007 the average per head profit was \$154.40 while in 2008 a per head loss of \$33.64 was incurred.

Profit varied by herd with the top 5 herds in 2007 averaging \$244.55 per head while the bottom 5 herds averaged \$70.76 per head. In 2008 the high profit herds returned \$61.84 per head while the low profit herds lost \$61.65 per head. The top 5 herds returned \$92.84 per head more than the average of all herds.

- Demonstrated that cattle can be fed to finish in North Dakota with producers own cattle
- Cattle can be fed to finish profitability in North Dakota.
- Wide differences occur between cow herds that influence feed yard performance and profit.
- Revealed carcass performance to herd owners and corresponding calf value.
- Introduced retained ownership as a cattle feeding option.

Feedback

“After reviewing the performance of my cattle and hearing the potential generate extra income by feeding my cattle to finish, I am going to get my banker involved in seeing if I can feed my cattle to slaughter rather than as weaned calves” - *Towner rancher, 2007*

“I have been a purebred breeder for over 30 years and wanted to see how my calves compared to others. I was nicely surprised that my breeding program produced the kind of carcass that gets premiums. And they grew well in the feedyard.” - *Gilby cattlemen, 2008*

“I want to get more money out of my cattle. This project allowed me to see if feeding them to finished makes sense. I was worried about death loss. I plan to participate again so I can have a history before I make a business change” - *Kulm farmer and cattlemen, 2008*

Contact

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