

Feedlot Schools Are Educational Opportunity for New or Experienced North Dakota Cattle Feeders

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Introduction

North Dakota cattlemen produce exceptional quality feeder cattle that are in demand by feedlot operators in other states. However, resources are available for feeding cattle in North Dakota to capture value from the excellent genetics and utilize some of the available feedstocks. Many producers now background their spring-born calves at least until January, and there is increasing interest in finishing cattle for terminal markets.

The North Dakota State University Feedlot School was developed to help educate and inform producers about cattle feeding. The Feedlot School is an annual program initiated in 1996. It is an intensive two-day school that offers training in all aspects of the feedlot enterprise.

Background

To evaluate the legitimate potential and competitiveness of feeding cattle in North Dakota versus the large commercial feedyards in Kansas and Nebraska, a multi-year research study was conducted with producer-owned calves in the early 1990s. Calves were gathered at the Carrington Research Extension Center and one group transported to commercial yards in Nebraska or Kansas during the three-year project. The results indicated that the lower feed costs per pound of gain (~\$.05 advantage) and feed availability were major advantages to cattle feeding in North Dakota even though gains were slightly higher in southern yards. Subsequent research in successfully mitigating winter weather with bedding and wind protection further supports the potential for cattle feeding in North Dakota. Feeds in North Dakota are very competitively priced compared to commercial feeding regions in the High Plains. North Dakota feeds include corn, barley, field peas, oats, wheat, several oilseed meals, corn distillers grains, wheat midds, barley malt sprouts, corn gluten feed, beet pulp, field pea chips, and soyhulls plus low cost forages and crop residues. New incentive programs for upgrading or building feedlots through EPA 319 and NRCS Equip program monies and new risk protection programs are available.

Feedlot School Curriculum

The program is an intensive two-day educational course that is offered for cattle feeders, industry personnel, educators, and anyone interested in feedlot management. The school visits commercial and research feedlots for observations in bunk reading, facilities, animal processing, and an update on current research activities. Attendees network with experienced NDSU field staff and specialists, and fellow students. The faculty includes veterinarians, nutritionists, meat scientists, marketing experts, experienced feeders, and other qualified instructors. Comprehensive printed resource materials are provided to those attending.

The topics presented at the NDSU Feedlot Schools include:

1. Feeding enterprises for specific markets including backgrounding, finishing, heifer development, and cull cow feeding.
2. Feed ingredients, nutritional value, and compatibility.
3. Recommended usage of feeds to meet animal requirements.
4. Ration formulation for optimum animal growth and profit.
5. Feed supplements, additives, and implants.
6. Grain processing, mixing rations, and feed bunk management.
7. Health management, vaccinations, detection of sick animals, and treatment.
8. Facility planning and design including working facilities, pens, and containment.

9. Manure management, composting, and spreading as fertilizer.
10. Marketing cattle, industry grids, carcass traits and value.
11. Risk management, hedges, puts and forward pricing.

In the 13 years that the feedlot school has been held, there have been 20 different schools that provided information to over 500 participants, with some repeat participants. The sessions are held annually at the Carrington Research Extension Center during late January. The same basic school has been offered at other locations some years, including Fargo, Hettinger, Williston, and Sidney, Montana. A feedlot school was offered in Maine modeled after the NDSU program, and a college course and training certification program in Colby, Kansas, was spurred by the NDSU Feedlot School. The program has reached producers in eight states and one province including South Dakota, Montana, Nebraska, Minnesota, Wisconsin, Oregon, Maine, and Manitoba. An evaluation is given at the end of every school that asks participants for honest feedback. The curriculum is adapted to producer needs based on these responses and has evolved over the years of the school.

According to the most recent North Dakota Agriculture Statistics Service Feedlot Survey (2008), from 2004 through 2007 the total number of feeding operations with 500 head or more capacity, has increased 16% from 130 to 151 feedlots. Total capacity has increased 20% from 189,000 to 226,300 head. The future of the North Dakota Feedlot School is to continue with the ongoing interest of the producers. Planning is underway for an “advanced” feedlot school for those that want a deeper understanding of nutrition, marketing, and management. The goal is to provide the utmost quality programming that makes the North Dakota State University Feedlot School partnership successful.

With the increasing interest in feeding cattle to slaughter weights in the Northern Plains, and the ample supply of cattle, feed grains, forages, and co-products for feedlot use across the area, the North Dakota Feedlot School has helped producers increase their working knowledge of feedlot operation. In addition to the material presented, the school serves a function to network feeders and faculty for future communications. All of the principles taught in the school are relevant to other regions as well and serves any area interested in feeding cattle. This program requires extensive collaboration between cooperating agencies, industry, and private operators all with the intent to make the cattle feeding business better for all parties involved. For information on attending an NDSU Feedlot School, contact the Foster County Extension office at (701) 652-2581 or the Carrington Research Extension Center at (701) 652-2951 or email: NDSU.Carrington.REC@ndsu.edu.

