

BACKGROUNDING OR FINISHING AS FEEDING ALTERNATIVES

There is a difference of opinion among North Dakota stockmen with regard to the net income that can be derived when calves are handled in a backgrounding program and marketed as feeders, weighing 700 to 800 pounds, compared to calves finished for slaughter. Some stockmen, because of the circumstances under which they operate, may not be able to hold their calves any longer than late winter or early spring, at which time they want to market at the top price for feeders. For those who could feed a greater length of time and utilize more cheap feed the question arises as to whether or not marketing as feeders will bring a greater income than those finished. There also is the question as to whether or not the top market price is received for feeders when a good gaining ration up to 750 pounds. Some livestock men believe that calves fed a good gaining ration will carry too much condition to bring top market price as a 750 feeder, and that those sold as feeders cannot be fed a ration for good gains.

Little work has been done on this method of handling calves when fed for good gains either to be marketed as feeders or when finished for slaughter. Some reports indicate that the income for feeders up to 700-800 pounds will not be less if a ration is fed that gives good gain resulting in growth along with additional condition. Others report that the increased weight which is cheaper because of faster gains will off-set the higher price that may be received for an animal which has made slower gains and has more frame and less condition.

This trial was designed to compare the economics of a backgrounding program with a finishing program for the North Dakota calf producer.

Table 25 - Summary of backgrounding or finishing as feeding alternatives		
	Backgrounding	Finishing
	December 3 - May 6	Dec. 3 - Oct. 28

	Moderate fed	Heavier fed	Moderate & heavy fed
Initial wt., lbs.	416	410	412
Weight out, lbs.	684	719	1052
Gain, lbs.	268	309	640
Selling value, \$	244.01	237.99	434.56
Initial cost, \$	118.8	118.8	118.8
Feed cost, \$	71.32	91.66	239.83
Net \$ - selling value less initial cost and feed cost	53.89	27.53	75.93
Feed consumed/hd:			
Oats, lbs.	745	1679	2756
Barley, lbs.	---	---	945
Tame hay, lbs.	1630	601	2023
Alfalfa, lbs.	125	123	301
Di-cal, lbs.	13	12	30
Salt, lbs.	50	48	120

Table 26 - Average feed consumption and feed cost - 1975		
	Heavier gain lots Dec. 3 - Oct. 28	Moderate gain lots Dec. 3 - Oct. 28

Feed/hd./day, lbs.	17.8	19.5
Feed/lb./gain, lbs.	8.77	10.6
Feed cost/cwt gain, \$	36.63	38.67
Feed cost/hd., \$	244.12	235.53

Table 27 - Gains at two feeding levels - finishing phase, May 7 - October 28, 1975				
	Heavier gain lots		Moderate gain lots	
Initial wt., lbs.	726	726	685	669
Final wt., lbs.	1103	1049	1041	1012
Gain, lbs.	377	323	356	343
Days fed	174	174	174	174
Avg. daily gain, lbs.	2.06	1.99	1.96	1.83

Table 28 - Carcass data and returns for two feeding levels - December 3 - October 28, 1975				
	Heavier gain lots		Moderate gain lots	
Avg. carcass wt., lbs.	645	613	601	605
Avg. carcass grade	1 Pr. 6 Ch.	3 Gd.	5 Ch.	4 Gd.

Dressing %	59.0	58.4	57.8	59.8
Avg. carcass value, \$	454.34	431.30	422.05	421.59
Initial cost @ \$30/cwt.	118.80	118.80	118.80	118.80
Feed cost/hd., \$	241.03	247.23	232.77	237.74
Total cost, \$	359.83	366.03	351.57	356.54
Net \$ - carcass value less - feed and calf costs	94.51	65.27	70.48	65.05

Summary: In 1974 the selling price was much too low in relationship to initial cost resulting in a loss for both backgrounding and finishing. In 1975 a more favorable balance resulted in a net above feed and calf costs for all feeding and marketing alternatives. This year the moderately fed backgrounded calves were probably the best alternative, all things considered. The trial will be continued in 1975-76.

[Back to 1975 Research Reports Table of Contents](#)

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