



## BeefTalk 673: Grass and Beef

### SUPPORTING MATERIALS

Feeding Yearling Steers	
	Net Return per Head
Feedlot in early May	-\$298.50
Feedlot in mid-November	
Without grazing pea/barley/corn	-\$30.10
With grazing pea/barley/corn	\$9.09

Dickinson Research Extension Center

*The Dickinson Research Extension Center has, for two years, compared keeping March- and April-born steers on grass versus sending the yearling steers to the feedlot in May.*

Grass and beef. Or should one say soil and beef because grass is a product of the soil?

The ultimate goal of any cattle operation is to maintain or improve soil quality. Seldom would one see a cow-calf operation that does not involve an extensive outlay of land. This combination of having an active living system of cattle, grass and soil is core to our continued existence.



Full Color Graphic  
[\[click here\]](#)



Grayscale Graphic  
[\[click here\]](#)



Adobe PDF  
[\[click here\]](#)

Fortunately, a lot is known on how to manage grass, as well as beef. The soil benefits when grass and beef are managed correctly. One also could say that grass and beef benefit when the soil is managed correctly.

As any good cook will tell you, a meal is a product of what is available. When the kitchen cupboards are lacking, so is the meal. Maybe it is just a favorite spice, but just the same, one misses the taste, so the goal is to keep the cupboards full. In the beef business, the goal is to grow good grass, which leads to good beef.

Soil without grass or grass without beef tends to be disturbing to those who are actively involved in the cattle business. However, the process of grass production probably needs to be expanded, realizing that perennial grass does not grow on all the acreage available.

More importantly, annual grass is abundant, and to expand the story further, annual crops are certainly part of this larger plant and beef picture.

The point is to keep living plants present as long as the seasonal growing period will allow and always providing for the many organisms we may not notice that are present in the soil. This constant living maze of activity comes to create a better environment that can be utilized by beef cows.

The Dickinson Research Extension Center has, for two years, compared keeping March- and April-born steers on grass versus sending the yearling steers to the feedlot in May. In other words, rather than haul the feed to the steers, the

steers were left on grass for their second summer of life and then sent to the feedlot.

The reason was to prepare the ranch for a shift to May calving and exploring options on how to get some money back once the ranch shortchanged the calf-growing season by 60 days.

Even at an average daily gain of 2.5 pounds per day, the center was bracing for a negative impact on a weaning weight of 150 pounds. At \$1.50 per pound, that amounts to \$225 per calf in estimated reduced revenue.

Having said that, the center also is exploring options that involve less grain consumption. As the world changes and there is increased competition for grain, cattle may not be in a great position to bid grain away from other sources.

Obviously, these calves could be pushed for higher gains in the backgrounding lots and placed on the market throughout the spring as calves get ready for the feedlot. However, what happens when grain outprices itself relative to the price that consumers are willing to pay for beef?

Well, there is grass, but how does grass fit in, or does it fit? Well, the questions far outdistance the answers, and at least for the center, those answers need to be found. For instance, for the past two years, one-third of the steers were placed in the feedlot in early May following a winter feeding protocol of a modest 1 pound or less average daily gain.

The other two-thirds were wintered the same. However, one-third spent the summer on perennial grasses, while the other one-third switched from grass to annual summer crops the third week of August. They foraged on a pea-barley mix, followed by standing corn. The grass cattle were moved to the feedlot in mid-November.

The bottom line: Thanks to the additional weight, those steers that were kept at home and on forage brought home more revenue to cover costs than did those steers that were shipped in early May.

The best group of forage-based steers was the one that was allowed to graze on a field pea-barley mix and standing corn. The next best group was the steers that grazed on perennial forage all summer.

The bottom line was a \$307-plus advantage for the mid-August grazing group that foraged on the pea-barley mix and corn and a \$268 advantage for those calves grazing only on perennial grass.

The Dickinson Research Extension Center utilizes the concept of building good soil and will have an open house on Aug. 19 if anyone wants to come for a visit. The open house precedes the 2013 National Grassfed Exchange annual meeting that will held in Bismarck on Aug. 20-22.

More information on both events can found at <http://www.ag.ndsu.edu/dickinsonrec> by accessing the schedules.

May you find all your ear tags.

Your comments are always welcome at <http://www.BeefTalk.com>. For more information, contact the NDBCIA Office, 1041 State Ave., Dickinson, ND 58601, or go to <http://www.CHAPS2000.com> on the Internet.

Copyright (c) 2010 BeefTalk.com. All rights reserved.

