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# A LITTLE BIT COUNTRY
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## CATTLE TYPE SHOULD DETERMINE FEEDING SYSTEM

Within the next 60 days most of our spring born beef calves will be weaned from their dams, marketed or placed in the home corral for backgrounding and sold at a later date at heavier weights.

There are many different methods or systems of backgrounding or growing beef cattle. Each has advantages and disadvantages. These pros and cons must be weighed by producers for deciding which system is right.

Experienced cattlemen recognize some types of cattle are better suited for a certain system than other types. Some cattle are best suited to be finished directly after weaning while other cattle are best finished following an extensive growing program.

One of the backgrounding systems has been termed as “preconditioning”. This involves holding the calves for 30-45 days and administering disease prevention vaccinations along with training the calves to eat from a feed bunk and drink from fountain waterers rather than tanks, streams or dugouts. The emphasis in this system is on keeping calves healthy and preparing them for entry into a feedlot. Body weight gains during this period will be minimal. However, the biggest advantage of preconditioning is to reduce the risk of disease problems once the calves are in the feedlot through proper pre-weaning and weaning vaccinations.

The wintering system of backgrounding generally involves using large quantities of forage through the feeding period. Calves are fed rations to gain 0.5 to 1.5 pounds per day. In most cases this system is used to prepare calves to be placed on pasture the following summer as yearlings. The overall goal is to keep calves healthy with the lowest possible feed cost. Small framed cattle generally fit this system better than larger framed calves. The larger framed cattle do not fit this system because these types of cattle

develop too much frame and will produce carcass weights which are often discounted because of their size. The current industry standards call for carcass weights between 550 and 950 pounds. Discounts of $15 per cwt are frequently reported.

The advantages of this system include the opportunity to sell all cattle for the stocker cattle market in April and May which is typically the season high. This system also allows breeders of smaller framed cattle to develop these calves at a slow rate of gain and take advantage of compensatory gain on grass during the summer.

The growing system of backgrounding involves feed rations which allows for significant weight gains. Such gains are usually between 1.5 to 2.5 pounds per day. The rations almost always involve the use of grains. The amount will depend on forage quality and desired weight gain. In many instances the producer's goal is to utilize feedstuffs that were raised on the farm or ranch or to make use of relatively inexpensive byproducts or screenings which are available locally. The biggest advantages in this system are the ability to market home raised feeds or inexpensive grains or byproducts and to market calves after the normal fall run of weaned calves sold in the fall. A potential disadvantage of the system is that cattle may become fleshy or over-conditioned and be subject to discounts at the time of the sale.

The fast-track system generally strives to push calves to gain weight in excess of three pounds per day. This system works best for larger framed calves. The fast-track system requires high levels of management requiring attention to nutrition, feeding management and grain processing. High levels of grain required in this system can cause digestive problems and death.

The calf-fed finishing system places cattle on finishing diets immediately following weaning or the 30-45 day preconditioning period. Calves placed into this type of system may attain harvest weights in time for the seasonal April high markets.

None of the above systems fit all types of cattle. The final market target (carcass weight) will determine to a large degree which type of system calves should be placed.