

MORE

ON THE COSTS OF RAISING IT YOURSELF

A couple of newsletters ago, Jane raised some questions about the costs of raising it yourself. It seemed the costs of producing one's own beef or eggs might well be higher than we'd like to admit or to analyze. She wanted to hear from someone who raised beef and kept records of what it cost.

We've had anywhere from one to seven beef animals on our stead at any one time ever since the second month we moved here in 1975. We've seen 22 beeves to their end and have six on the place now.

We've kept fairly accurate records, but I think that these records reflect only part of the picture. Much of such an operation is specific to each farm or situation.

We have a fair sized barn (24 stanchion) which we use free stall for the beef. We have a little over 50 acres of meadow which are hayed by a neighbor on a 2/3 his - 1/3 ours share. The average number of bales taken is about 1800 total per year. Our whole relationship with this neighbor is part of the entire business. Not only does he do our hay, but we keep some of his heifers (10 at the moment), we borrow his machinery, we buy calves from him, we call on him for advice, he calls on us for bull labor, etc. No money usually is exchanged but we do try to keep track and sit down together in the late fall each year to tally up and carry over to the next year.

A further word about hay. It would cost about \$1 a bale. For their first winter we feed about .4 bale a day and about .6 the second winter. Looking back over the past four years, we've averaged 190 feeding days per winter, ranging from 175 days in 1979-80 (11/9 to 5/3) to 204 days in 1981-82 (10/27-5/19).

We have two milk cows who provide all the milk for our calves, besides presenting us with two of the four beef calves we hope to start each year. Milk replacer is expensive, and I think this is what inflates the initial six months' expense of a steer.

Our present procedure is to feed calf starter for the first couple of months, switching to corn meal through their first winter and then just pasture and hay for the rest of their lives, except for 100 lbs. of corn meal during the month to six weeks preceding butchering. We have done a number of animals with just some calf starter initially and then only pasture and hay. They turned out O.K. but we feel now that their first winter is too hard without something more than just hay.

We have no machinery expenses. We use a wheelbarrow, garden cart and a horse with cart to move manure. Fencing has been an expense and we've come to rely on the electric. Last summer we pastured 22 animals and they used just about every one of our 100 acres, including the garden in one horrendous case.

We don't butcher the animal until it's at least two years old. We've found that we don't care for "baby beef" (anything beyond the veal stage and less than about two years old), and we feel that the folks buying our meat are used to full-grown beef.



Let me give one personal history, to flesh out the stark chart that follows. Daffy was a Hereford-Jersey out of our own Jersey, which cost \$9.50 to inseminate twice before she stuck. He was born April, 1980 and butchered September, 1982. He was on mother's milk for the first two months. We fed him 150 lbs. of calf starter (\$16.73) from about five weeks to five months of age. Then we gradually switched over to corn meal and fed him about a one-pound coffee can full twice a day through his first winter till turn-out time in the spring (5/12/81), which totalled 488 lbs. of corn meal for \$38.98. There are about 70 one-pound cans in a 100 lb. sack of feed. The price of ground corn varies through the season, from year to year, and from dealer to dealer. It's more expensive now than the \$8/100 lbs. it averaged for Daffy three years ago. In June '83 we paid \$8.59, in October \$9.60, and last month \$9.60. For the rest of his life from 5/12/81, Daffy had just grass and hay, although Amy and Lisa said he did once try to eat them. For some reason, he missed out on the usual pre-butchered 100 lbs. corn meal treat. His share of the seven salt blocks we used in his 2½ years was \$2.00 and of the scour boluses, \$.90 (we tend to feed them raw eggs for scours).

We had him butchered by Wayne Foepfel out of Gouverneur who does the deed on your place and hauls everything away--for \$10. That brings our money investment in Daffy to \$78.11. His hanging weight was 569 lbs. and we sold him for \$1.10/lb. hanging weight, for a total of \$625.90, which leaves a profit of \$547.79.

We've had no problems finding customers. Even if our animal is of a non-beef type and is primarily grass fed, the meat is significantly better than what's being sold off the shelf downstreet. Plus, we make a point of soliciting feedback from our customers; our meat is less expensive; and it is about as organic as one is going to find.

We now sell by the whole, half or quarter. Foepfels' charge charge \$.16/lb hanging weight to cut and wrap the meat, bringing the total consumer cost to \$1.26/lb. hanging weight if we charge \$1.10/lb. hanging. To give some idea of how much real meat this is, last fall we kept half of one of the Holsteins we had butchered. This half weighed 230 lbs. hanging, which ended up as 161 lbs. of packaged meat. We chose to have the front half of the half made into hamburger--92½ lbs. The rest of the half was round steak--19½ lbs, sirloin--12, porterhouse--10, rump roast--6, heel round roast--4, sirloin tip roast--9, and neck bones--8, plus there was a 10 lb. liver (5 lbs. for this half). That makes 166 lbs. of packaged meat for \$289.80, or \$1.75/lb.



The figures on one of our Hereford-Jerseys are more complete (Freckles I, butchered 10/80). His hanging weight was 500 lbs., which resulted in 362½ lbs. packaged, plus 12 of liver (so 374½ packaged pounds at \$1.26/hanging pound cost \$1.68/package pound): hamburger--124½, porterhouse steak--26, round steak--47, sirloin steak--28, rib steak--7, stew meat--8½, chuck roast--38½, English roast--18, rump roast--15, sirloin tip roast--19, heel round roast--8, rib roast--10½, and neck bones--6½.

Now to the chart. One might have to do a little figuring on the side to put the information on this chart in consistent terms throughout. Over the first few years, we sold three live animals through the auction barns and one steer directly to an individual. The purchase price for some of the early barter calves was never pinned down exactly. One scale we've seen estimates that an animal of 1,000 lbs. live weight will have a hanging/dressed weight of 615 lbs. and a packaged/real meat weight of 432 lbs. We have not always sold meat just by the hanging weight, but I estimate that we've always gotten at least \$1.05 a pound hanging weight.

| WHO | SOLD | | RECEIPTS PRODUCED | EXPENSES | | | | TOTAL EXPENSE |
|--------------------|------|-------|--|--------------------------|----------|------------|-------------------------------|---------------|
| | BORN | F. #D | | PURCHASE | FEED | VET. OTHER | BUTCHER SHIPPING & COMMISSION | |
| Big Fella (H) | 6/75 | 11/76 | 423 lbs hanging | 27.00 | 32.52 | .00 | 10.00 | 69.52 |
| Kaboom (H-J) | 2/76 | 11/77 | 460 lbs hanging | 7.55 insemin. | 39.43 | 19.11 | 15.00 | 81.09 |
| Snukas Cow (HR) | 7/76 | 9/79 | 441 lbs hanging & 2 calves (Caffy & Little Wonder) | bartered from a neighbor | 79.95 | 8.45 | 10.00 | 98.40 |
| Button (A-H) | 4/77 | 11/78 | \$369.80 (860 lbs live) | c. 45.00 | 42.40 | .00 | 17.35 | 104.75 |
| Stinker (A-H) | 6/77 | 11/78 | 333 lbs hanging | c. 45.00 | 38.15 | 1.69 | 10.00 | 94.84 |
| Little Fella (A-H) | 7/77 | 9/78 | \$140.00 | c. 45.00 | 25.72 | .00 | .00 | 70.72 |
| Freckles I (Hr-J) | 4/78 | 10/80 | 500 lbs hanging | (AI) 7.35 | 26.85 | 3.12 | 10.00 | 47.32 |
| Caffy (Hr) | 4/78 | 12/79 | \$380.00 | (AI) 7.35 | 32.63 | 7.31 | 21.40 | 68.69 |
| Cufu (Ar) | 5/78 | 11/79 | \$351.45 (720 lbs live weight) | 35.00 | 10.76 | 1.00 | 18.75 | 65.51 |
| Itchy (Ar) | 6/78 | 12/79 | 315 lbs hanging | 35.00 | 11.11 | 1.00 | 10.00 | 57.11 |
| Poppy (H) | 7/78 | 10/80 | 570 lbs hanging | 45.00 | 4.50 | 8.39 | 10.00 | 67.89 |
| Little Wonder (Hr) | 3/79 | 11/81 | 679 lbs hanging | neighbor bull | 23.00 | 8.00 | 10.00 | 41.00 |
| Pete (A-H twin) | 4/79 | 5/81 | 390 lbs hanging | 50.00 | 5.92 | 5.94 | 10.00 | 71.86 |
| Repeat (A-H twin) | 4/79 | 11/81 | 528 lbs hanging | 50.00 | 16.31 | 6.21 | 10.00 | 82.34 |
| Daffy (Hr-J) | 4/80 | 9/82 | 569 lbs hanging | (AI) 9.50 | 56.53 | 2.08 | 10.00 | 78.11 |
| Bully (H) | 6/80 | 1/81 | died of pneumonia | 95.00 | 26.37 | 14.83 | .00 | 136.20 |
| Putput (H) | 7/80 | 9/82 | 458 lbs hanging | 95.00 | 61.69 | 8.17 | 10.00 | 174.86 |
| Buttercup (J) | 7/81 | 9/82 | 139 lbs hanging | (AI) 15.65 | 64.79 | .00 | 10.00 | 90.44 |
| Dandy (H) | 8/81 | 9/83 | 458 lbs hanging | 118.40 | 55.56 | .00 | 10.00 | 183.96 |
| Clover (H) | 8/81 | 9/83 | 430 lbs hanging | 102.40 | 55.56 | .00 | 10.00 | 167.96 |
| Ruff (Hr-H) | 7/82 | 11/83 | died mysteriously, cause still unknown | 35.10 | 24.27 | .00 | .00 | 59.37 |
| Little Angus (A-H) | 8/83 | 8/83 | died after about one struggling week of life | 30.00 | .00 | .00 | .00 | 30.00 |
| | | | 6693 lbs @ 1.05/lb = \$7027.65 | | | | | |
| | | | payments 1241.25 | | | | | |
| | | | \$8268.90 | \$900.30 | \$733.84 | 95.30 | \$212.50 | \$1941.94 |

H = Holstein, J = Jersey, Hr = Hereford, A = Angus, Ar = Ayrshire

The figures for the six animals now in residence are to this point:

| WHO | Born | Purchase | Feed | Vet, Other |
|---------------------|------|--------------|---------|------------|
| Freckles II (Hr-J) | 4/82 | \$ 9.80 (AI) | \$54.43 | \$ 9.39 |
| Dropsy (Hr-J) | 7/82 | 17.60 (AI) | 27.55 | .00 |
| Rose (Hr-H) | 7/82 | 35.00 | 22.38 | .00 |
| Freckles III (Hr-J) | 6/83 | 8.30 (AI) | 40.56 | .00 |
| Thistle (J) | 6/83 | 8.30 (AI) | 40.56 | .00 |
| Susie (A-H) | 7/83 | 60.00 | 27.83 | .00 |

I haven't been as religious about analyzing as about amassing these data. This exercise has been instructive. It confirms our desire to do at least part of our own haying and thereby to expand our beef operation. If anyone has suggestions or strategies for making hay in a small-scale, alternative way, we're all ears. Also, we'd welcome any other advice or ideas that the above information might suggest to anyone.

-- Bill Sutkus

INTERVIEW WITH



BRIAN & VEIGH LEE

One of the fringe benefits of being "Articles Editor" is that I get to do interviews. What a great excuse to ask personal questions of people you hardly know. I had heard about Brian and Veigh through the homestead grapevine and thought they sounded like interesting people. I was right. Here is an interview conducted in December on the day Brian turned 35.

-- Kathy Montan

K - Are you natives of this area?

B - No, I was born in Minnesota and then lived in Iowa until I was 17. From there, I moved to a place outside of Albany.

V - I grew up in North Greenbush, just outside of Albany. It turned out that Brian and I lived across the street from each other although we actually met in a bar. We lived six years together in a place near Albany.

K - What brought you up here?

V - We corresponded with a guy for three years who we heard about in the Mother Earth News. We were originally interested in communes and we're still working towards that.

B - We found an abandoned farm in Rossie and wrote the owner. He said we could caretake the place, and we moved up right away. We were in Rossie for three years.

K - Tell me more about your interest in communes.