

Wintering and Fattening Beef Cattle in Alabama

TWO DISTINCT feeding problems confront the beef producer in this State: one is the wintering of the breeding cows and young stocker cattle; the other is the fattening of steers. These two problems are discussed briefly in this leaflet. Rations are suggested for the wintering and fattening of beef cattle.

WINTERING BEEF CATTLE

Each year cattle are wintered on many Alabama farms without feed other than that obtained on the pasture or range. Cattle managed in this manner lose heavily in flesh during the average winter and many of them die from starvation if the weather is severe. It is not necessary or even desirable that the breeding cows be kept fat throughout the winter, but they should never be allowed to reach a distinctly poor and unthrifty condition. In many cases losses of 50 to 100 pounds per cow are permissible if the cows are fat in the fall of the year.

Since cost is a major consideration the wintering ration should consist largely of cheap, home-grown roughage such as silage, low-grade hay, velvet beans in the field, or cottonseed hulls. If this is not sufficient to keep the animals in a thrifty condition a small amount of cottonseed meal or other such concentrates should be added.

Wintering Rations.—Any one of the rations listed below is good for wintering dry cows, heifers, and stocker steers.

Ration No. 1—Velvet beans, grazed in the field.

Ration No. 2—Stacked Johnson grass hay with access to the hay field.

Ration No. 3—Grass hay 15 to 20 pounds and cottonseed meal 1 to 2 pounds per head daily.

Ration No. 4—Silage 30 to 35 pounds and cottonseed meal 1 to 2 pounds per head daily.

Ration No. 5—Grass hay 15 pounds and legume hay 5 pounds per head daily.

Ration No. 6—Soybean, cowpea, peanut, or other legume hay 15 to 20 pounds per head daily.

Ration No. 7—Cottonseed hulls 15 to 20 pounds and cottonseed meal 1 to 2 pounds per head daily.

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Substitutions:

- 1—Peanut meal may be substituted for cottonseed meal in the above rations at the rate of 1 pound of peanut meal for 1 pound of cottonseed meal.
- 2—Ground velvet beans may be substituted for cottonseed meal at the rate of 2½ pounds of velvet beans for 1 pound of cottonseed meal.
- 3—Five pounds of broken ear corn, or ground corn and cob meal, may be substituted for an equal amount of legume hay in Ration No. 6.

FATTENING BEEF CATTLE

Because of the low-acre yield and subsequent high price of corn and other grain crops, conditions in Alabama are not as well adapted to the fattening of cattle as to the producing of calves and the growing of stocker and feeder steers. However, farmers in Alabama who grow surplus feed may find it profitable to fatten one or more car loads of steers during the winter months. Cottonseed meal, peanut meal, velvet beans, and other southern-produced concentrates can be combined with southern-grown roughage, such as silage and hay, to make a very satisfactory fattening ration.

Fattening Rations.—Some very good fattening rations for use on Alabama farms are given below. The amounts of feed recommended in each ration is based on the requirements for steers weighing 500 to 800 pounds.

- Ration No. 1—Silage 35 to 40 pounds and cottonseed meal 5 to 7 pounds.
- Ration No. 2—Grass hay 15 to 20 pounds and cottonseed meal 5 to 7 pounds.
- Ration No. 3—Silage 20 to 30 pounds, grass hay 5 to 10 pounds, and cottonseed meal 5 to 7 pounds.
- Ration No. 4—Grass hay 15 to 20 pounds or silage 35 to 40 pounds, corn 10 to 12 pounds, and cottonseed meal 2 to 3 pounds.

Substitutions:

- 1—Cottonseed hulls may be substituted pound for pound for grass hay in Ration Nos. 2 and 4.
- 2—Oats or blackstrap molasses may be substituted pound for pound for one-half of the corn in Ration No. 4.
- 3—Peanut meal may be substituted pound for pound for cottonseed meal in any of the above rations.
- 4—Ground velvet beans may be substituted for cottonseed meal in any of the above rations at the rate of 2½ pounds of velvet beans for 1 pound of cottonseed meal.

Starting Cattle on Feed.—Roughage may be fed to cattle in unlimited amounts from the beginning of the feeding period. It is a good plan to feed only 1 or 2 pounds of concentrates per head daily during the first week and to increase this amount 1 or 2 pounds each week until a full feed is reached. The rapidity with which the ration is increased should be determined somewhat by the length of the feeding period. It is necessary to increase the ration faster in a short feeding period than in a long one.

Hogs in the Feed Lot.—There is no particular advantage to be derived from putting hogs in the feed lot unless the steers are receiving corn or other grain. If grain is being fed enough hogs should be placed in the feed lot to clean up the grain in the droppings. Shoats weighing approximately 125 pounds are preferable for this purpose as there is not so much danger of them being crippled by the steers as where smaller animals are used.

Length of Feeding Period.—The length of the feeding period should be governed by the amount of feed available, the age and quality of the cattle being fed, and the condition of the market on which the cattle are to be sold. Young cattle of good quality can be fed longer at a profit than older cattle. Since many of the cattle fattened in the South are not of the best quality and the rations used contain very little, if any, grain the feeding periods are generally comparatively short, ranging from 90 to 120 days.

General Considerations.—Every effort possible should be made to insure comfort and quietness in the feed lot. Any unnecessary commotion on the part of steers will tend to reduce daily gains. Feed lots should be located on high, dry ground so they will not become muddy during rainy seasons. If the feeding is done under cover the shed or barn should be kept well bedded with straw, leaves, or other such material.

Steers which are on full feed require a large amount of water. Fresh, clean water and salt should be provided in the feed lot at all times.

