Beef’s Lifecycle

Our entire beef community works daily to raise high quality beef (food) for American families. So, where does this all begin? The beef lifecycle begins on every cow/calf operation (farm/ranch) where the operations’ maintain a herd of Mother cows for raising beef calves.

First, cows (mature female cattle-Mothers) and bulls (intact mature male cattle-Daddys) are mated to raise calves (babies or young male and female cattle). During a 9 month (282 days) gestation period farmers/ranchers pay close attention to their Mother Cows, making sure there are no problems during their pregnancy. If any issues arise, farmers/ranchers or veterinarian (animal doctor) can step in to ensure the health and safety of Mother and baby.

Cows receive assistance from farmers/ranchers and often veterinarian during the birthing process. Which is also known as calving. Farmers/ranchers are there step by step. When a young calf is born, it weighs 60-100lbs depending on its parents genetics and just how well the Mother cows’ body preformed nutritionally during gestation. A new born calf will spend the first few months of life drinking its Mother’s milk and grazing or eating on large green grass pastures. Today, cattle are born and raised in almost every state in the USA on farms and ranches such as ours in Claiborne County Tennessee.

Animal Safety is an important priority. Its important for farmers/ranchers to be able to identify their cattle for the safety and security of their herd (a group of cows, bulls and calves). Some cattle farmers/ranchers use ear tags, (which is quite fashionable; for the girls to wear earrings) This will identify the animals with a number in their ear. Before beginning the weaning process, other calves may receive a custom brand; either by hot irons or freeze branding, so they are identifiable from a distance. The branding process does not cause any long term harm or pain to the cattle. Additionally, some ranchers in the western states are required by law to brand their cattle.

Before 4 months of age, the testicles are often removed from male calves being raised for beef, through a process called castration. Castration occurs because bulls display more aggressive behavior and can cause harm to other animals, farmers/ranchers, so removal of the testicles improves over-all safety for the animals and animals’ care takers. Removal is quick, low stress and the calves begin the healing process immediately, (much like when you cut your finger) The calf, following the process is now known as a steer.

Cattle with horns can cause injury to other cattle. For this reason, horns are removed in a process called dehorning. The American Veterinary Medical Association recommends the cattle be dehorned at the earliest age possible, same as castration.

For these procedures (castration and dehorning) and others; education and tools are provided to farmers/ranchers to ensure proper cattle care (management). In 1987, the “Beef Quality Assurance” program was developed to ensure proper cattle care through each and every stage of the beef cattle lifecycle.

The lifecycle continues, at 6 to 10 months of age and approximately 500lbs, calves are ready to begin the weaning process. The calves are moved away from their mothers milk in order to graze on green grass pastures, where they eat grass and other forages that are indigestible to humans. The weaning process permits calves to become independent of their mothers milk so they continue to grow and thrive on the grass pasture.

After weaning is complete, the beef lifecycle continues. Many calves are purchased at livestock auction markets (our calves are marketed through the Hodge Livestock Network) by farmers/ranchers known as stockers or backgrounders. However, some calves (about 1 in 3 female calves) are kept on the farm. They are used for breeding animals or “mothers to be and the lifecyle begin all over again.

In every stage of the beef lifecycle, farmers are dedicated to the health and safety of their animals on the farm. Cow/calf operations are just the beginning o f how our beef community comes together to bring beef (food) from the farm to the American families dinner plate.

Following the stocker phase these mature calves move to the feedyard. Here they spend 6 months where they have access to fresh water and eat a balanced ration (eat or dieta0 from feed bunks. The cattle have room to move around in clean and comfortable lots.

Once the cattle reach a market weight of 12 to 1400 lbs at around 20 to 24 months of age they are sent to a harvest or processing facility. Here USDA inspectors (veterinarian) over see the safety, animal welfare and quality standards until the final product (meats) are shipped to restaurants and grocery stores. The grocery store and restaurant is where beef is sold to the American families for their dinner tables.

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