NEWSLETTER

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Please contact your local extension office for the print version of any article included in this newsletter.

Here's your May Driftless Ag Update!

Hello and congratulations on receiving our May Driftless Ag Update!

This newsletter is co-written by your local UW-Madison Extension Ag Educators, Beth McIlquham (livestock) and Sam Bibby (crops).

Notes from your Regional Crops Educator- Sam Bibby

Dicamba can be a great burndown option ahead of corn and often provides a short period of residual control even during dry conditions. However, there are a lot of options from products with a safener such as Diflexx to traditional products like Clarity. Deciding which dicamba product to use can be confusing. Read up on the label differences and why you might choose one over the other in this article by Dr. Rodrigo Werle at https://badgercropnetwork.com.

Are you planting your soybeans green and terminating a rye cover crop post-plant? We know from Rodrigo Werle's research that 4,500 lbs. of rye biomass is the sweet spot for suppressing waterhemp and avoiding yield loss in soybeans. But what about residual herbicides? Doesn't all that rye biomass interfere with their performance? Discover which herbicides may work the best and read about the research at https://badgercropnetwork.com.

Notes from your Regional Livestock Educator- Beth McIlquham

Badger Dairy Camp: The Department of Animal and Dairy Sciences and the Dairy Innovation Hub are excited to announce the return of Badger Dairy Camp to the University of Wisconsin campus from July 9-12, 2026. The goal of this program is to educate youth about the breadth of areas that contribute to Wisconsin's dairy industry and the higher education and career opportunities available. More information about the camp and applications are available at - Decision Tool Reminder: Just a reminder that UW-Madison Extension offers decision tools and software to assist beef, small ruminant, and swine producers make informed financial choices. All tools can be found on the UW-Madison Extension Livestock website. If you have any questions, please reach out.

Watch for Artificial Insemination Course: This summer, there will be a two-day artificial insemination course held in Richland Center. More information will be out soon. If you are interested, I encourage you to sign-up quickly after information comes out, as the class will fill up fast. More information will be advertised in this newsletter and on your local Extension's Facebook page.

Disease Digest: To see HPAI updates in dairy herds in Wisconsin, check out the Extension Dairy webpage. HPAI was confirmed in poultry flocks in Dane, Jefferson and Walworth counties in March. To see HPAI updates in poultry flocks, visit the Extension Livestock webpage. There have been no cases of New World Screwworm in the U.S. in livestock, but more information can be found here. For information on Asian Longhorned Ticks, check out the recorded Beef Roundup Webinar session where Dr. Olds presented the latest information. For animal owners of all kinds, please evalutate your biosecurity protocols, including pest management..

Save The Date: Arlington Agronomy and Soils Field Day

Join UW–Madison grain agronomy, field crop pathology, weed management, soils, forage, and farm economics researchers for a half-day field-based tour of the latest ongoing trials and research updates.

Artificial Insemination Course in Richland Center

The Artificial Insemination Program features an interactive and fun approach to learning about breeding cattle. Hands-on activities are used throughout the program to assist participants in learning about breeding their cattle. Registration is open to the first 15 paid participants only.

Register:
https://livestock.extension.wisc.edu/2026/02/16/uw-madison-division-of-extension-announces-2026-small-ruminant-webinar-series/

Parasite Patrol Plus FAMACHA Workshop

Intestinal parasites in sheep can significantly impact the health and performance of a flock. From decreased production to a compromised immune system, sheep owners of all types can struggle with high parasite loads. Extension colleagues are excited to share this workshop with producers to equip them with tools and strategies to help curb intestinal parasites in their flocks.

Register:
https://go.wisc.edu/wtj7ki

Badger Crop Connect 2026

The Badger Crop Connect webinar series returns Thurs., April 9 at 12:30 p.m. and continues every second and fourth Thursday of the month through October. Tune in for research updates and timely topics for the Wisconsin farmer or agronomist. CCA CEUs available.

Register:
https://cropsandsoils.extension.wisc.edu/programs/badger-crop-connect/

How Phosphorus and Potassium Move (or Don't): The Agronomy Behind Stratification

Written by Landon Baumgartner

Introduction

Stratification, or the unequal distribution of nutrients within the soil profile, has been well documented across Wisconsin, with the most concentrated nutrients existing within the upper 2" of soil in all fields. Having reduced or eliminated tillage on more acreage across Wisconsin in recent decades, it is worth considering what has happened to soil stratification over that time, especially when it comes to Phosphorus (P) and Potassium (K). First, let's review a couple of factors that may contribute to stratification in reduced tillage settings.

P and K inputs are often surface applied, or at least within the first 2" of soil. When there is no mechanical mixing of inputs at deeper levels of the soil, the nutrients stratify, creating a very nutrient rich area near the surface which interacts with precipitation or meltwater. This can lead to increased risk of phosphorus loss in both the dissolved and particulate forms into nearby surface water, especially if soil is left uncovered.

What are the Agronomic Implications of Stratification?

The main topic I get regularly questioned on, and hope to share insight on as a nutrient management specialist with a soils background, is what we currently know about the agronomic implications of nutrient stratification. One of the recurring questions I receive most from farmers is whether nutrient stratification hurts crop production. Second, what actions should be taken to alleviate any potential negative impacts from stratification. If you are a crop advisor, you may have been presented with an identical question recently, or if a farmer, wondered about this yourself.

The conversation is usually aimed at getting to the bottom of one actionable question, "Should I till, at least occasionally, my no-till fields so I even out where my nutrients are located, providing my plants better access to them." This is a valid question.

I prefer to first take this question and frame it through the lens of additional questions.

1. No-till causes many changes to our soils, including but not limited to soil temperature, moisture, and structure, which cannot be isolated from stratification as a soil feature no-tillers have to consider. So how do we decide which factor to attribute crop performance to and affect change?

2. If we have adequate soil tests for P and K, does nutrient stratification really mean we are struggling with those nutrients being available and taken up by the plant?

3. Can we assume that tillage, whether it be deep or shallow, is going to solve the issue if nutrient stress is occurring?

4. Is adding tillage to the system going to pay for itself AND have the pros outweigh the cons in my context?

What Does Research Reveal About Stratification?

Agronomically, the research that has been done to answer these questions is relatively consistent and encouraging. From Kansas to Ontario, from Kentucky to Iowa, spanning the 1980s, 1990s, and 2000s, university-based researchers have studied corn, soybean, wheat, and even sorghum responses to P and K applications across tillage history, fertilizer placement depth, and soil types.

Even across all these variables in space and time, a few consistent themes have stood out when datasets were viewed broadly.

1. Crop uptake of P and K often does not improve with tillage. In fact, no-till plots often had higher crop uptake of these macronutrients, or at least a higher return on investment of nutrient inputs.

2. Deep banding phosphorus in the crop root-zone, typically 4-8" below the soil surface, to make nutrients more available in the crop root zone, consistently yielded lower or not well enough to offset the added costs of deep banding when compared with surface or shallow-placed fertilizers. Deep banding of potassium has shown more promise in providing yield benefits, albeit alongside higher application costs.

3. No-till is likely to result in higher organic matter levels and microbial activity alongside the higher P levels at the soil surface, allowing organic-bound P to become more plant available.

Key Takeaways

Several factors could contribute to the consistency of these results across studies. First, plant roots are capable of proliferating in a soil profile wherever resources are plentiful, allowing plants to adapt and utilize nutrient dense layers where they exist, instead of the other way around. Another is that in our no-till systems, sufficient moisture is often maintained more consistently than tilled systems, allowing for better nutrient mobility, availability, and conditions for root systems to grow as actively as possible. Lastly, with less soil disturbance, mycorrhizal fungi increase, further enhancing a plant's ability to scavenge nutrients throughout a soil profile wherever they may be located.

Nevertheless, increased phosphorus in shallower soil layers is worth paying attention to when it comes to guiding our water quality improvement decisions. That starts with consistent and adequate soil testing to avoid unnecessary P build-up, and to allow for sustainable P draw-down in soils with excessively high P. Based on the research that has been done, it

soil environment that long-term no-till creates, including moisture retention, increased soil biological activity, temperature moderation, and organic matter accumulation, provide many crop production benefits, even alongside potential exacerbation of the nutrient stratification process. This is not to say that in some years and in some soils altering fertilizer placement strategies or employing strip-till won't pay off. Introducing full-width tillage to eliminate P and K stratification appears economically and agronomically unnecessary for Wisconsin no-till farms.

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Livestock Producers Encouraged to be on the Lookout for Asian Longhorned Ticks

Written by: Livestock Program

The Asian longhorned tick is an invasive species first positively identified in the United States in New Jersey in 2017. It has been rapidly expanding westward across the United States primarily as unwanted and undetected passengers on cattle and other livestock as they are moved around the country from areas where it is established. It has been identified in the adjacent states of Michigan, Illinois and Iowa within the past two years. To date, this tick has not been identified in Wisconsin, but research suggests that Wisconsin's climate is suitable for it to survive.

Threats posed by Asian Longhorned Ticks

Asian longhorned ticks pose threats to livestock and cattle, in particular. The Asian longhorned tick is not a very selective feeder and will attach and feed on a wide range of animals. This tick species multiplies by a process called parthenogenesis, meaning they do not have to mate with males to reproduce and almost all the ticks that are produced are females. A single female can lay up to 3000 eggs, so they can multiply rapidly and pastures can accumulate very high populations of ticks. This can result in high numbers of ticks, up to thousands, feeding on an animal at one time, leading to anemic conditions from blood loss, especially for small animals. High infestation rates also lead to discomfort and decline in growth and performance.

Disease Risks and Health Impacts on Cattle

The Asian longhorned tick is also a vector for Theileria orientalis, which is a protozoan organism that attacks red and white blood cells in cattle. Symptoms include lethargic behavior, heavy labored breathing, anemic symptoms, late term abortion, and potentially death. Death losses of up to 20 percent have been reported. Some cattle who get infected don't show any symptoms. Cattle can recover, but all cattle that become infected are infected for life. Stress can cause recovered animals to relapse. It can also be transmitted via needle or other instruments that could transfer blood from animal to animal. There is no vaccine at this time.

Importance of Early Detection and Prevention Measures

Early detection helps livestock producers be proactive in implementing control measures to reduce the risk of catastrophic problems. Inspecting livestock and pets regularly for ticks around the ears, underlines, "arm pits" of front and rear legs, and around the tails and tail heads will help detect the ticks early. Inspecting new herd additions, applying an acaricide with good coverage, and isolating the animals for a time to monitor them for ticks and cattle for symptoms of Theileria can help reduce the risk of introducing the tick. Many of the pour-on and spray-on products used for fly control are acaricides. If you find ticks on livestock they can be submitted to your veterinarian or to the UW-Madison Department of Entomology for identification.

Additional Resources and Information

More detailed information on the Asian longhorned tick, Theileria, and management practices can be found in a new UW-Madison Extension fact sheet titled The Asian Longhorned Tick: An Emerging Threat.

Direct Marketing Meat: Beef

Written by Adam Hartfiel and Beth McIlquham

Introduction

Direct marketing offers a way for beef producers to potentially capture more value for their livestock. By cutting out parts of the supply chain – distributors, marketers – they may earn a larger share of the total selling price. It should be said that by cutting out these supply chain pieces, they are also taking on those roles themselves. Extra time and effort put into advertising, customer relations, sales and distribution can decrease the amount of time livestock producers have to care for their animals. Before understanding more about selling beef, read our article on how to get started in direct marketing.
https://livestock.extension.wisc.edu/articles/direct-marketing-meat-getting-started/

When is a Beef Animal Ready for Harvest?

Factors such as breed, fat cover, muscling, age, diet, and weight all help determine when a beef animal is ready for harvest. All cattle deposit fat differently, so it is important to look at key locations on the animal to determine their readiness for market. Some of these locations include the brisket, ribs, flank, tail head, width of stance, and cod or udder regions. A rule of thumb is a body condition score of 7 will generally result in a carcass with a Choice quality grade.

Overall Muscling

Beef animals grow into their frame (bone) and grow muscle before depositing fat. A good, muscled animal would show it in the loin and rump. Muscling can be impacted by many factors, including genetics, nutrition, management style, breed, and age.

Fat Covering

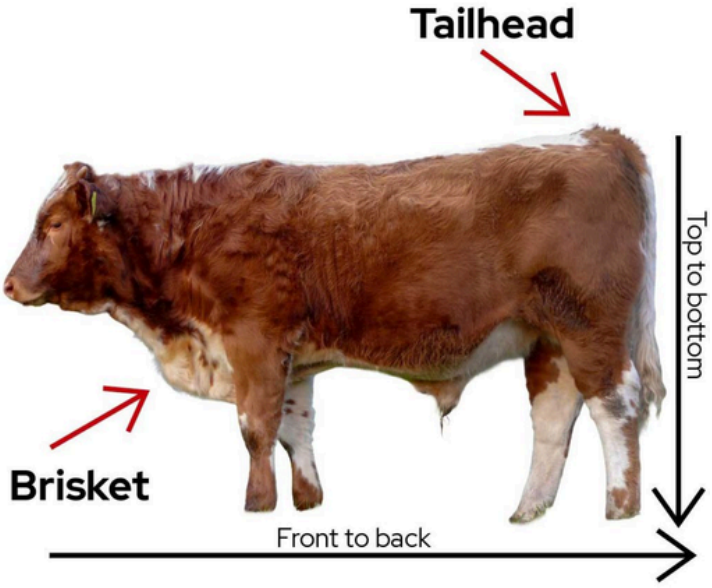
Cattle lay on fat from front to back and top to bottom. This means the brisket will show signs of fat before the tail head does. If steers have been knife castrated, often they will show signs of finish with cod fat. On heifers, look at ribs and udder fat as additional indicators of finish.

Brisket

A visible distribution of fat into the brisket area (may have the appearance of a small ball). Finished animals should have low hanging briskets. Animals who are not finished will display pointed and narrow briskets, representing the lack of fat deposited into the brisket area. It is important to not let animals get overfinished and obtain excessive fat deposits as it will increase the yield grade of the animal.

Tail Head

The amount of fat deposited on each side of the tail head. Animals with an abundance of fat cover will have a square appearance over the top of the tailhead, when viewed from behind, with areas of fat on each side of the tailhead.



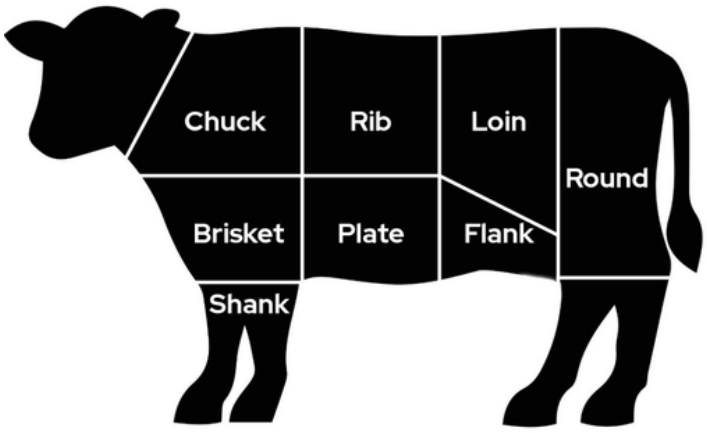
Cattle will finish front to back, top to bottom. Finished animals will have fat in the brisket and tailhead.

Age

Most cattle are fed a grain-based finishing diet and are harvested between 15-24 months of age. Grass finished animals are usually harvested between 24-30 months and generally take longer to finish due to a lower rate of gain. The age of harvest will vary based on feeding program, breed, and muscling.

Fabrication

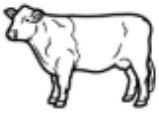
When fabricating (taking apart or breaking down a carcass), it is first cut into the primal cuts. These cuts divide the carcass into smaller pieces. The 8 primal beef cuts are chuck, rib, loin, round flank, plate, brisket, and shank. These primal cuts are further broken down into retail cuts, which are the types of cuts found in grocery stores or in meat markets



Primal cuts of a beef carcass.

For every one animal, there are two of each primal. For example, if a producer sells four quarters of the same animal direct-to-consumer, only two of those consumers can get a brisket. An entire animal cannot be processed into someone's favorite meat cut.

Beef producers who sell direct-to-consumers have options for how they would like to sell an animal. If selling in quarters and halves, let your customer know the options they have up front, so there are no surprises along the way.

Live Weight	Hot Carcass Weight	Chilled Carcass Weight	Take Home Product
			
1200 lbs	744 lbs	718 lbs	481 lbs

A whole beef animal will not turn into meat. Bones, organs, and trim must be accounted for when determining how much meat will be take-home product.

How Much Meat Do I Take Home?

Unfortunately, 100% of the live weight of the animal cannot be used for edible products. If a steer weights 1200 lbs. prior to harvest (live weight), only about 744 lbs. of that animal will be there once the heart, lungs, and gastrointestinal tract are removed. This weight recorded immediately after harvest is called the hot carcass weight. After refrigeration, the carcass will shrink by roughly 3.5%, resulting in a chilled carcass weight of 718 lbs. The chilled carcass is then broken down into smaller cuts.

Boneless-closely-trimmed retail cuts refer to the portion of the carcass that remains after the excess fat and bones have been removed. What is left over is the take home meat. Total take home meat will depend on how much of the live animal you are committed to purchasing. A previously discussed 1200 lb. live animal will yield approximately 481 lb. of take-home meat. So, a customer that purchases a whole animal would expect to receive 481 lb. of edible meat. Note that customers who order bone-in products will have an increased take-home weight to account for the addition of bone.

Take Home Meat Based on a 1200 lb. Animal	
Customer's Order	**Closely Trimmed Take Home Meat**
Whole	481 lb.
Half	240.5 lb.
Quarter	120.25 lb.

Measuring Beef Quality

Beef quality is defined by quality grade and yield grade. Quality grade measures 'how good' the beef is. Yield grade measures 'how much' beef can be harvested from the carcass. The combination of quality grade and yield grade helps predict the taste and quantity of meat harvested from a carcass. Quality and yield grades can only be assigned by a USDA grader. Connect with your processing facility to see if this is an option for your product.

Measurements for both are taken after the carcass is harvested and split down the spine, creating two halves. Then, each half is ribbed (cut between the 12th and 13th ribs) and evaluated looking at the ribeye. Collecting this information can help producers advertise their product and/or give feedback on how their management practices affect meat quality

Quality Grade

Quality grades are influenced by two factors:

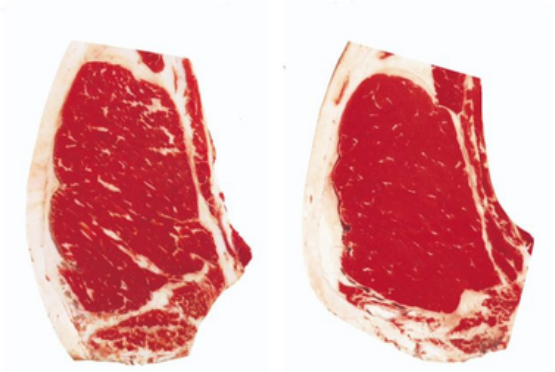
1. Maturity of the animal; and
2. The amount of fat within the muscle (also called marbling or intramuscular fat)

Maturity is described by the letters A, B, C, D, and E, where A is younger (18-30 months of age) and E is older (over 96 months of age). The age of the animal is important to meat quality because as the animal ages, meat becomes tougher and less satisfying for consumers. It is important to note that cattle over 30 months of age generally have a much more difficult time earning a 'Prime' quality grade and may limit ability to sell bone-in cuts. Maturity can be determined by lean color and size, shape, and ossification (the process of cartilage tissue turning into bone) of the bones and cartilage.

Quality Grade	Prime	Choice	Select	Standard
Generalized cosumer Perception				

Generalized consumer perception of Prime, Choice, Select, Standard. Keep in mind that there is variation in individual consumer preferences

Marbling is determined by the amount of fat laid within the muscle (seen as little white flecks in raw meat). This type of fat is important because it largely affects the consumer's eating experience due to its flavor-adding qualities. Research has shown a positive relationship between the amount of marbling and consumer satisfaction. A marbling score refers to the amount of fat in the meat. This score is commonly described as "Abundant, Moderate, Modest, etc." Meat with more marbling receives a higher marbling score and a more desirable quality grade.



Examples of ribeyes with moderate (left) and small (right) marbling scores. Pictures from USDA AMS.

Final quality grades are determined by combining the maturity of the carcass and the marbling score assigned. Then, using the beef quality chart, a quality grade is given. For example, if a carcass is 'A' maturity and is given a marbling score of 'Moderate', it would receive a High Choice (Ch+) quality grade.

Degrees of Marbling	Maturity				
	A	B	C	D	E
Slightly Abundant	PRIME				
Moderate			COMMERCIAL		
Modest	CHOICE				
Small					
Slight	SELECT		UTILITY		
Traces					
Practically Devoid	STANDARD			CUTTER	

Maturity increases from left to right

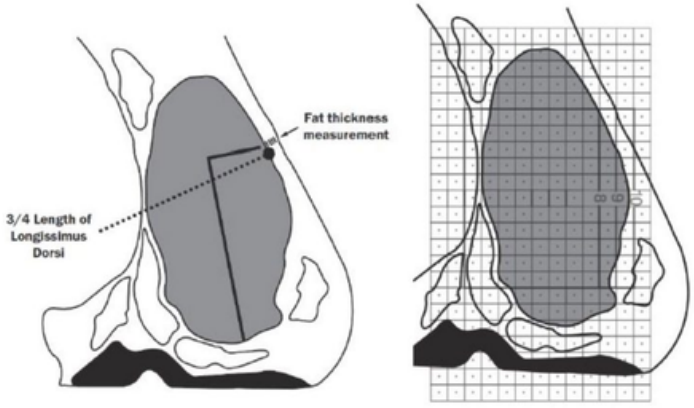
Yield Grade

Yield grade measures the 'cutability' of the carcass. This describes how much product can be harvested from the carcass. Yield grade is measured on a numerical scale ranging from 1 to 5, where 1 describes leaner and more muscular carcasses,

Yield Grade Equation	Abbreviations
2.5 + (2.5 x **BF**) + (0.2 x **%KPH**) + (0.0038 x **HCW**) - (0.32 x **REA**) Yield Grade	**BF:** Backfat **%KPH:** Kidney, pelvic, and heart fat **HCW:** Hot carcass weight **REA:** Ribeye area

while 5 describes fattier and more "wasty" carcasses. This number is calculated through a yield grade equation.

The backfat and ribeye area measurements are taken after the halved carcass has been ribbed. As the yield grade equation demonstrates, backfat has the largest effect on yield grade because it has the highest multiplier, followed by ribeye area.



Backfat is measured ¾ of the way down the outside of the ribeye and is recorded in inches. Ribeye area is measured on the face of the longissimus dorsi muscle and is recorded in square inches. Photos from NCBA Beef Checkoff. Source: https://www.beefresearch.org/resources/product-quality/fact-sheets/beef-grading

Costs and Timeline of Processing

Live cattle will go through a series of steps to become a marketable meat product. The process begins with slaughter, where animals are stunned, bled, skinned, and eviscerated. The resulting carcass is then split in half down the spine and aged to develop its full flavor and tenderness (hanging time). Hanging time refers to the amount of time a carcass spends hanging in the cooler to achieve maximum tenderness and flavor. The hanging process allows enzymes to break down connective tissue, leading to a more desirable eating experience for the consumer. While hanging, a carcass will typically lose around 5-7% of its original hanging weight. This weight loss is attributed to moisture loss, also known as "shrink". Research has suggested that the average amount of time a beef carcass should

be chilled is around 10-14 days but will ultimately depend on the consumer and processors' desired outcome. Hanging times may vary between processors, and they can explain options available to you.

It's best to discuss the available options and their capabilities beforehand.

Finally, the carcass is cut (fabricated) into different products, ranging from large primal and subprimal sections to trim and individual retail-ready portions. The cuts you select, wrapping options, and specialty products (smoking, meat sticks, etc.) may also change the cost per animal. All these processes are done at a cost, and buyers and sellers should agree in advance on how they will be handled.

Processing costs will vary between processors but in most cases when purchasing an animal off its hanging weight, consumers will be responsible for paying:

- An agreed upon price per pound for the animal based off its hanging weight. ($/lb.)
- Cost from the processor to fabricate (cut) the carcass into desired cuts. ($/lb.)
- A set/flat slaughter fee, plus cost for labeling or other optional services like smoking, grinding, etc. if desired. ($/lb.)

**All costs and pricing may vary from processor to processor and is completely up to their discretion*

For any beef producer, asking your processor questions about cutting costs, packaging options, delivery, and other associated costs is best practice. Understanding the whole process and costs beforehand makes it easier to communicate with your potential customers. Processors are there to provide you with tips, recommendations, and help you through the process to make your meat experience smooth and enjoyable.

Making "Cents" of Your Dollar

The Freezer Beef Pricing Worksheet and Grass-Finished Freezer Beef Pricing Worksheet are intended to help buyers and sellers determine sale prices for direct marketing wholes, haves, or quarters of grain-fed beef animals or grass-finished beef animals. These spreadsheets can be utilized to calculate estimated returns for beef producers, as well as for beef producers to communicate with their buyers on the economics of purchasing beef direct from the farm.

- Freezer Beef Pricing Worksheet (Grain-Fed)
- Grass-Finished Freezer Beef Pricing Worksheet

The Cornell Meat price calculator simplifies pricing for meat sold by the cut or carcass. This free tool helps producers ensure that they cover all input prices to make themselves a profit.

Summary

Recently, consumer awareness of where food comes from and interest in buying directly from producers has increased. As a result, many producers have begun selling beef directly to consumers. This producer-consumer relationship is a great opportunity to build trusting relationships with consumers and welcome more beef consumers.

Beef producers may be able to capture more value by selling direct-to-consumers. Understanding when an animal is ready for harvest and what a high-quality beef product looks like are the starting points to success. Be sure to follow national, state, and/or local rules and regulations when selling beef. For more information on direct marketing in Wisconsin, read our article on how to get started in direct marketing.

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