



THE BEEF LIFECYCLE

The beef lifecycle is one of the most complex of any food, taking anywhere from one and a half to three years to bring beef from pasture to plate.

It takes a community of people to bring beef from pasture to plate. This includes farmers and ranchers, feedlot operators, livestock auction market owners, and packing plant workers as the primary people who care for and raise cattle across the U.S. The beef community also includes veterinarians, animal nutritionists, pen riders and welfare specialists who ensure cattle are cared for and have a proper diet, room to roam and medical care.

Finally, restaurants, grocery stores, and families like yours are a very important part of the beef community and contribute to beef's sustainability and innovation.

Beef farmers and ranchers care about their animals, and the top priorities for everyone in the beef community are healthy animals, and a safe, nutritious, high-quality and delicious protein for consumers.



1

COW-CALF

Hundreds of thousands of cow-calf farms and ranches, most family owned and located in all 50 states, breed cattle and raise calves. The cows nurse their calves and eventually the calves graze on grass pastures within sight of their mothers.

STOCKERS AND BACKGROUNDERS

Calves transition from a diet of mostly milk, to eating a variety of grasses, hay and other plant-based feeds. Calves may move to stocker or backgrounder farms and ranches, where supplemental feed is provided, including vitamins and minerals, to meet their changing nutritional needs as they grow.

2



3

LIVESTOCK AUCTION MARKETS

Cattle farmers and ranchers may work with an auction market to sell their cattle to other beef producers, feedlots or processing facilities. Advances in technology now allow auctions to be hosted through video and the internet, as well as in person.





FEEDYARD

4

Between 6 and 12 months of age, cattle may leave a farm or ranch and be moved to a feedyard where they spend 4-6 months or longer. Staff, including nutritionists, veterinarians and pen riders care for the animals daily. Cattle have constant access to water and eat at feed bunks containing a balanced diet that may include grains (eg: corn, wheat, soybean meal), roughage (eg: hay and grass) and local renewable byproducts (eg: distillers grains and beet pulp).



5

PACKING PLANT

Once cattle reach market weight at 18 to 24 months of age, they are sent to a packing plant, also called a processing facility. United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) inspectors oversee the implementation of safety, animal welfare and quality standards from the time animals enter the plant until the final beef products are shipped to grocery stores and restaurants in the U.S. and abroad.

FACTS AT A GLANCE:

50

STATES ARE HOME TO
COW-CALF FARMS AND
RANCHES

91%

OF FARMS AND
RANCHES ACROSS
THE U.S. ARE FAMILY
OWNED AND
OPERATED

40

HEAD IS
THE AVERAGE
HERD SIZE

4-6

IS TYPICALLY THE
NUMBER OF MONTHS
CATTLE SPEND AT A
FEEDLOT

130

COUNTRIES IMPORT
U.S. BEEF DUE TO
GLOBAL DEMAND

RETHINK THE RANCH BY VISITING

www.beefitswhatsfordinner.com/raising-beef



Funded by Beef Farmers and Ranchers