



# ALTERNATIVE BEEF MARKETING

LIVESTOCK TECHNICAL NOTE

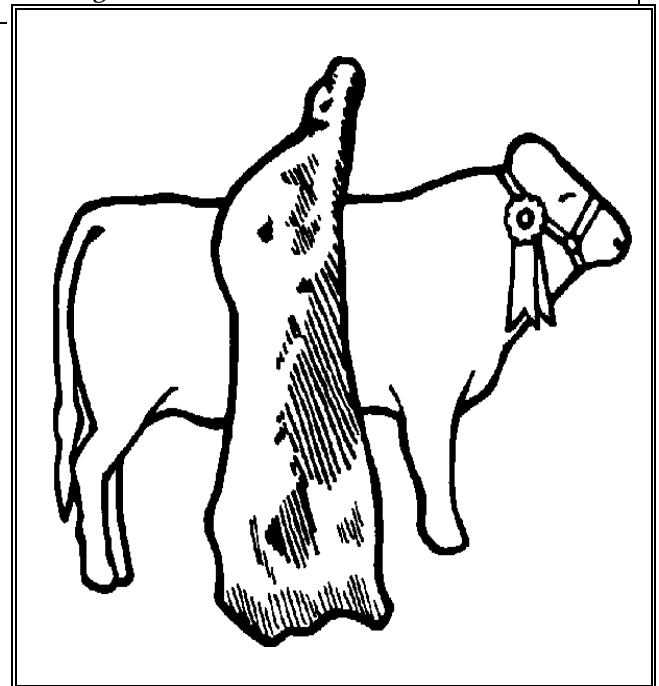
ATTRA is the national sustainable agriculture information center funded by the USDA's Rural Business -- Cooperative Service.

**Abstract:** *This publication explores marketing alternatives for small-scale cattle ranchers who would like to add value to the beef they produce. Part One discusses methods for adding value within the conventional marketing system, including retained ownership and cooperative marketing. Part Two introduces alternative marketing strategies, including niche markets for "natural," lean, and organic beef. Production considerations for pasture-finished beef are given special attention. A section on direct marketing focuses on connecting with consumers and developing a product. Processing and legal issues are also covered. Two case studies from a UC-Davis report—including an economic analysis—are provided as an enclosure. A list of resources at the end of the document provides suggestions for further reading, contact information for several producers and marketers of "alternative" beef, and Web pages of interest. This document is intended as a beef-focused supplement to ATTRA's Alternative Meat Marketing, which presents in greater depth the many issues and challenges associated with small-scale meat sales.*

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## Introduction

In the present production and marketing structure, about half the value of beef is added after cattle leave the farm, and net returns to the cow-calf producer tend to be low. At the sale barn, the rancher's profit is trimmed by wholesale price fluctuations, "middle-man" fees, and the grading process. Producers who sell in this highly competitive market can be described as "price-takers," competing with many other producers of relatively homogeneous commodity products (1).



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Working within the conventional market, the rancher can significantly increase profit per head of cattle—by retaining ownership past the weaning stage, by producing higher-grade and heavier animals, by carefully managing the culling process, and by minimizing the costs of production. Small producers can further empower themselves by forming marketing cooperatives or other types of alliances.

Some ranchers, however, judging the conventional market as unresponsive both to their needs and to the changing desires of consumers, choose to develop markets outside

the conventional system. They add value to their beef by *differentiating* it from the supermarket fare that is the end product of the commodity market. Alternative marketing of beef primarily means *niche marketing* and *direct marketing*. The “niche” is simply a segment of the buying public unsatisfied with conventional beef, and willing to pay a premium for a leaner, tastier, or more “natural” product. The most likely way for the producer to connect with these consumers is by marketing *directly* to them. In the words of researchers at the University of Wyoming:

This approach can add value to cattle...[by allowing] producers to capture much of the margin otherwise going to middlemen in the marketing chain. Of course, the producer also ‘captures’ much of the work and associated costs, as the producer must identify and attract customers, perhaps provide added feed, arrange for slaughter, distribute the product to customers, and secure payment (1).

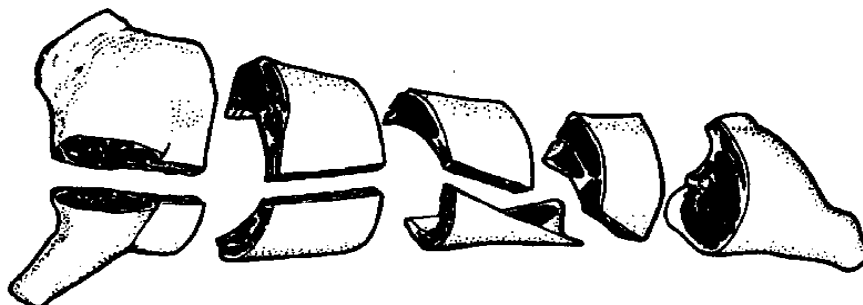
Differentiating your beef from the conventional product entails changes in production as well as marketing. If your customer is a meat packer, your production will have to conform to industry standards for everything from breed selection to use of antibiotics to yield and quality grades. But if your customer is an individual looking for lean beef raised and finished on a local family farm, or raised organically, you will be working with a very different production model. Integrating meat production and marketing may radically alter the whole enterprise. For instance, to improve efficiency within the conventional live-sale market, many ranchers have consolidated their calving schedules. Some alternative marketing strategies, however, may require year-round production to meet year-round demand (2).

Beef that is slaughtered off pasture and sold locally is generally considered more *sustainable* than feedlot-finished, mass-marketed meat. Sustainability means that the best interests of the farm family, the community, and the environment are being taken care of. For some consumers, sustainability is already a strong selling point. Many others can be educated about the values they are fostering when they choose an alternative beef product over the supermarket cut. Pasture finishing combined with direct marketing can substantially benefit the farm family, the rural community, and the environment by:

- keeping ranch families on the land and independent,
- protecting land from development,
- reducing pollution of surface and ground waters,
- building soil and plant diversity,
- rebuilding local rural economies,
- passing down traditional farming and animal husbandry skills.

Alternative marketing strategies can turn price-takers into price-makers, but “the added time, labor and resources needed to perform these added functions beyond producing a calf or yearling” should not be underestimated. “Marketing management expertise also is required, along with the traditional knowledge of the production side of the business” (1). The more you learn and prepare before entering a new market, the less surprising, expensive, and frustrating your “learning curve” will be.

The “Beef Marketing Flowchart” on page five of the enclosed University of California report will help you to visualize the issues involved in pursuing different marketing strategies.



## PART ONE: ADDING VALUE TO BEEF IN THE CONVENTIONAL MARKET

One of the first things you hear when you get into the subject of marketing with a commercial cattle producer, and even with people who run some pretty good size yearling operations, is that cattle are only worth so many dollars a hundred on the market, and it doesn't matter what you do, you aren't going to get more than that. *This just isn't true.* In fact, you can have a great deal of control over the prices you receive for the cattle you sell (3).

The passage above appears in *Cowboy Marketing* by the late Jay Nixon. According to Nixon, "most commercial calf producers in this country are losing from \$50 to \$100 per cow." They incur this loss by not being active enough in their marketing effort, and not focusing their production on the quality preferences of the market. *Cowboy Marketing* is a primer for producers who have not considered themselves as marketers, and perhaps have a prejudice against marketing.

Nixon advocates raising a marketable product by producing what the packers want, and encourages producers to carefully choose a sale barn, get to know buyers, and prepare a list of the animals they are bringing to market. He also maintains that "culling—what you cull, how you select it, and finally how you market it—is an income decision of major proportion." The book includes chapters on selling cattle in the country by private treaty and co-op marketing, and development of a marketing plan. For information on obtaining a copy of *Cowboy Marketing*, see the **Resources** section at the end of this publication.

Another guide to increasing profits within conventional marketing channels—*Value-Added Cattle: Guidelines for Cow-Calf, Stocker, Feeder*—emphasizes retained ownership options. By retaining ownership through some of the post-weaning production stages (preconditioning, winter pasture, summer grass, and the feedlot), producers can decrease losses from shrinkage and sickness, eliminate middleman fees, and improve the return rate relative to production

costs (the pre-weaning stage is the most expensive stage of production). Retained ownership can provide buffering from seasonally low prices, giving some measure of price protection not available to those "selling a bawling calf straight off the cow" (4).

Value can be added to beef through improvement of carcass value. This means turning out carcasses:

- with good yield and quality grades,
- weighing no less than 550 pounds and no more than 900 pounds,
- with sufficient muscling, fewer bruises, and no "dark cutters" (a dark appearance in meat from animals that were stressed prior to slaughter) (4).

The authors of *Value Added Cattle* recommend the Texas A&M Ranch to Rail program, which provides feedback to producers about the performance of their calves after weaning.

Producers complain that they get average prices in the market place for superior genetics and that they don't receive a premium for delivering a product to the market that has been managed to perform above the average of the industry...The cattle industry is a segmented business in which most calves lose their identity in the market channels. There is little feedback of information to cow-calf producers on how their calves fit the needs of the beef industry...[The] Ranch to Rail program is an information feedback system that allows producers to learn more about their calf crop and the factors that determine value beyond the weaned calf phase of beef production. It also helps them to establish the relative value of their calves compared to the industry norm (4).

To learn more about the Ranch to Rail program and retained ownership considerations, and for information on yield and quality grades and breed sire selection, contact a local Extension office.

### Alliances

In a marketplace dominated by large buyers, the independent small producer is at a disadvantage. By creating economies of scale and allowing for effective coordination, *alliances* among producers with similar goals can add value to beef and increase the members' marketing leverage.

Alliances can integrate the cattle market both horizontally (among producers) and vertically (among producers, breeders, feedlot operators, packers, etc.).

An alliance is generally developed around some common goals or values, which may include a health and management program, a specific breed, a geographic identity, or an emphasis on leanness. Alliances allow cow-calf producers to share equally in potential profits through retained ownership, and improve beef cattle consistency by grouping together animals of like type, finish and cutability. Alliances do not guarantee profits. Premiums are given only to cattle that meet specifications. Good management is the key. Most alliances provide carcass data feedback to producers (5).

Colorado rancher Dan Kniffen offers the following cautions for those considering whether to join an alliance:

- The best source of information is direct contact with the alliance's program coordinator. Ask as many specific questions as you can think of. Also ask for names and phone numbers of other participants.
- A good contract will protect both parties in the agreement, providing a timetable and specifying the responsibilities and financial liability of everyone involved.
- Some alliances will require you to place a minimum number of cattle in the program to participate. Almost all alliances have specifications on the genetic composition or biological type of the cattle that are accepted. There are also limitations on carcass size and quality.
- The most critical aspect of an alliance for the producer is the pricing formula. You must absolutely do your homework in this area. Once you've determined how the base price is established, you must pay particular attention to the "premium" and "discount" categories. It's quite possible to receive enough discounts on a few non-conforming cattle to offset all the premiums received on a majority of the cattle. Producers who have some estimation of how their cattle will perform in the feedlot as well as on the rail are in the best position for this type of marketing (6).

According to financial consultant Tom Hogan, few cattle producers really have a grasp on their costs of production. Before joining an alliance,

Hogan recommends first finding out the carcass quality of your cattle.

Retain a set of cattle, run them through to the rail and see how they do. Once you've figured out where you are and where you want to be, pencil out what it will cost you to get there...The key is to avoid discounts. If that means a rancher has to participate in an alliance to learn how to do it, then join one. But in chasing a premium, don't lose sight of all the other efficiencies. That premium won't cover what you lose. Whether marketing through an alliance or outside of one, you're still a price taker and the only way you can be profitable is for production costs to be lower than your receipts (7).

### **Marketing Cooperatives**

An increasingly common type of alliance is the marketing cooperative. A cooperative is a producer-owned, democratically operated business structure with written by-laws. Cooperative marketing arrangements among cattle producers often take the form of packaging cattle in pools for sale. Packaging means that cattle are merchandized by putting them into groups with particular characteristics to meet the needs of buyers (8).

While most cattle operations in the U.S. are relatively small, the marketing system is geared toward large, uniform lots of cattle. The number of cattle in a lot influences the price buyers are willing to pay. The optimum lot size for feeder cattle sold through a regular ring auction is 50-55 head; for a video auction the number rises to about 240 head. Uniformity of weight and sex is also important in getting the best price for a lot. A study conducted at Utah State University found that buyers at a video auction paid approximately \$1.70/cwt. more for uniform lots of cattle than for lots that were not sorted by sex and weight. This means that a 500-pound calf sold in a uniform lot would bring \$8.50 more than a similar animal sold in a non-uniform lot (8).

**A Cooperative in Utah operates in basically the following way:**

1.) *Each member of the co-op indicates the number of steer and heifer calves he or she will provide to the pool the coming year. This becomes a marketing agreement between the co-op and the producer.*

2.) *The calves are pre-priced through a video auction using videos and descriptions of “representative” calves. The calves normally are sold in six pools—three for steers and three for heifers, based on different weights. For example, the three steer pools may have average weights of 450 lbs., 525 lbs., and 575 lbs. The pools normally range in size from 150 to 250 head. Pre-pricing through a video auction eliminates the need to gather the cattle to obtain bids. Producers know the day delivery will take place and the price they will receive before the cattle come off the range.*

3.) *On the day of delivery, producers are responsible for bringing their calves to the loading/unloading facilities. After unloading, the calves are brand inspected and sorted for different pools. The sorted groups for each producer are weighed, and then are placed into their respective pools. Records are maintained on the number and weights of cattle for each producer in each pool. After the pool is completed, the cattle are loaded and shipped.*

4.) *The co-op is paid by the video auction company and the co-op issues a check to each producer based on the total weight they contributed to each calf pool.*

*Producers in this cooperative believe that pooling has been a very successful method for them to increase the price they receive for their calves. No members of the co-op have more than 200 mother cows, and some of the producers have fewer than 10 calves to contribute to the overall pool (8).*

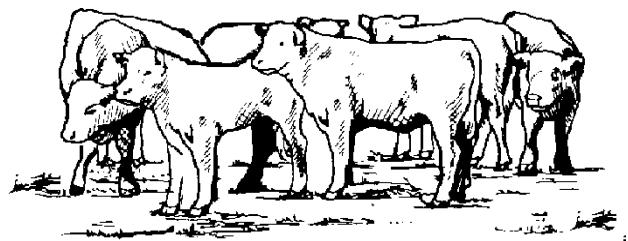
According to the 1997 Census of Agriculture, the majority of farms with cattle have fewer than 50 head of beef cows (9). The average cow-calf operator, after accounting for weaning percentage and held replacement heifers, probably has fewer than 30 calves to sell each year—of both sexes and with a range of weights. Packaging cattle into uniform lots of optimum size is therefore not possible for most cow-calf operators on an individual basis (8).

For the small producer selling in the conventional market, a cooperative calf pool is a great way to get the best possible price. It does require commitment, time, extra work, and, obviously, a willingness to cooperate with other ranchers. For a co-op to work, rules must be firm, fair, and strictly enforced. The rules must set the quality standards of the group; any member whose cattle do not meet the standards is not allowed to sell through the co-op.

The cooperative should be set up as a corporation. As Jay Nixon advises in *Cowboy Marketing*, “Each member should have a real financial stake in the co-op, money he took out of his pocket and invested up front, the amount based on the number of cattle he will deliver for marketing...so that if the co-op makes money, each member is paid according to his interest” (3).

For detailed information and assistance on forming a cooperative, contact the USDA-RBS Cooperative Services Program (see **Resources**). For a “yellow pages” of existing alliances, contact:

BEEF Magazine  
7900 International Dr., Suite 300,  
Minneapolis, MN 55425



## PART TWO: ALTERNATIVE MARKETING OF BEEF

### Niche Markets

Corporate consolidation in the beef industry has narrowed the marketing options for small-scale producers. It is increasingly hard for the family ranch at the bottom of the food processing chain to maintain profits at an acceptable level. This environment has pushed many ranchers out of the business, and inspired others to by-pass the industry and market their own products.

At the same time, the industry has faced a continuing decline in beef consumption. By the early 1990s, chicken sales had surpassed beef sales for the first time (2). Factors in this decline in market share include

- lifestyle changes among consumers,
- health risks associated with beef fat and with “red meat” in general,
- concerns about use of hormones, steroids, and antibiotics,
- concerns about bacterial contamination,
- and “the inability of the consumer to purchase a consistent, quality product from the traditional meat case” (2).

It is clear that the industry is failing to meet the demands of a considerable number of consumers. The successful niche marketer will target those poorly served consumers, identify their needs, and produce a consistent, high-quality product that satisfies those needs. Alternative beef marketing operations typically describe their product with some combination of the following terms: **lean, organic, natural, pasture-finished** (or **grass-fed, or grass-finished**). Other common selling points for alternative beef include “no antibiotics,” “locally raised,” “family farm,” and “humanely produced.”

Before a beef product can be labeled with terms that denote uniqueness or superiority of some kind the producer must file an “Animal Production Claim” with the Labeling Review Branch of the USDA. This involves submitting a label application, a prepared (manufactured) label including the claim in question, and an Operational Protocol (OP). An OP must be in the

producer’s own words and must state in detail how the animals are raised, including ration formulations, sick animal protocol, herd health management, and other facts relating to the proposed claim (e.g., “no antibiotics,” “natural,” “organic”). The term “chemical free” is not allowed to be used on a label (2). For details on submitting an “Animal Production Claim”, including specific requirements for the OP, contact the Labeling and Additives Policy Division of FSIS (see **Resources**).

### *Lean beef*

While the industry has paid some heed to the growing consumer demand for lean beef, the existing system is still based on USDA standards that give the best grade to carcasses with the most marbling. There is growing agitation within the industry to reform the grading process to better reflect current market trends. Jay Nixon addresses this issue in *Cowboy Marketing*:

I know that many cattlemen consider the current diet fads of the consumer, **our ultimate customer**, as a passing thing. And many of them are. But the most rabid prejudice those consumers have is against fat in their diets. This makes the marbling standards of the grading system for beef a negative factor in the marketing of the product...To have a so-called Quality Grade based solely on the single factor that consumers object to most strenuously is just plain stupid. And, I don’t believe that this objection is just going to go away (3).

Lean beef appeals to more than a niche market—the mainstream consumer trend is toward low-fat and fat-free foods. Though the industry has been slow to respond to this reality, the grading process will most likely be changed to accommodate production and marketing of lean beef, which is defined as having 25% less fat than the industry average. While “organic” and “pasture-finished” beef clearly represent niche markets, lean beef is suited to the conventional marketing structure. Laura’s Lean Beef (see box) is an example of a large-scale alliance that

combines an unconventional product with conventional marketing methods. The small niche marketer probably cannot rely on leanness *alone* as a selling point. To compete with lower-priced conventional lean beef, other qualities

### Laura's Lean Beef

Based in Kentucky, Laura's markets lean beef in nine states and is endorsed by the American Heart Association. No preservatives, salts, or fillers are used in packaging. Started in 1985 as a "value adding experiment to a family stocker operation," by 1995 the company was debt-free, worth \$20 million, and employing 30 people. Today, Laura's Lean Beef is sold in 2,400 stores in 30 states. Retail sales for 1999 are expected to top \$55 million.

The company contracts with family farms to raise genetically lean breeds such as Limousin and Charolais, on natural feeds only, with no routine antibiotics or hormone implants. Grazing, particularly rotational grazing, is an important part of their program, as is low-stress handling of the animals. The cattle are pasture-finished, with a quick grain feed at the end.

As a high-volume commercial business, Laura's Lean Beef is not suited to working with small cow-calf producers on an individual basis. Like the beef industry in general, the company deals with truckload lots of uniform weights and breeding. Small producers would need to create a cooperative calf pool in order to work with the company, which does offer price protection to ranchers with whom it contracts (10). Producers interested in the details of Laura's cattle program should visit the company's website: [www.laurasleanbeef.com/cattleProgram/](http://www.laurasleanbeef.com/cattleProgram/). See **Resources** for further contact info.

lacking in the mainstream product will need to be highlighted, with an emphasis on customer service.

### *Organic beef*

Until recently the USDA did not permit "organic" labels for livestock products, pending federal standards for organic certification. Even farm names with the word "organic" were not permitted on the label. However, in January 1999 the USDA approved the use of a federal label for the interstate sale of "organic meat" (11).

As with other labeling claims, the "organic" label must be evaluated and approved by the USDA's Food Safety Inspection Service (FSIS). An application must be submitted, accompanied by the proposed label and the documentation provided by the certifying organization.

In general, organizations certifying organic beef have the following requirements:

- The calf must be born of a certified cow (or in some cases, fed organic feed from 30 days of age).
- 100% of the feed must be certified organic.
- The animal must be treated humanely at all stages.
- Antibiotics, wormers, growth promoters, or insecticides not on the program's list of approved natural products are not permitted (animals requiring antibiotic treatment must be marketed through conventional channels).
- The animal must be clearly identified, so as to be traceable from birth to slaughter.

*The National Organic Directory* lists organic beef buyers and suppliers around the country. Some market conventionally; others direct-market. (See **Resources** for information on ordering this publication.) For a more detailed discussion of

### Coleman Natural Meats

Based in Colorado, Coleman is the nation's largest producer of certified all-natural beef, and the first to receive a USDA "natural" label. Coleman contracts with more than 600 ranchers throughout the West to produce meat without hormones or antibiotics, and the vacuum-packed cuts are marketed nationwide in many natural and mainstream food stores. Coleman promotes itself as a steward of the environment, educating ranchers about grazing practices that improve range conditions. This appeals to "green market" customers who seek ecologically raised products. Their meat production is advertised as natural, humane, and "unhurried." See **Resources** for contact information.

organic certification, and a list of certifying organizations, request the ATTRA publication *Organic Certification*.

## ***Natural beef***

Under current USDA policy, meat may carry the “natural” label if it contains no artificial ingredients (color, flavor, preservatives, etc.) and is minimally processed. The label must explain the use of the term (e.g., “no added colorings or artificial ingredients” or “minimally processed”). “Natural” production methods must be documented. In popular usage, the term “natural” commonly refers to beef that has been raised mostly on pasture, without routine use of medication. The feed is not necessarily organic.

## ***Pasture-finished beef***

The 1997 UC-Davis report on “Natural Beef”, in summarizing the history of beef finishing in the U.S., notes that:

The feeding of high energy, grain-based diets to beef animals prior to marketing is a relatively new phenomenon. Prior to World War II, beef was primarily finished on forage. Beef animals were developed relatively slowly on forage-based diets, were significantly older at slaughter, and aged post-mortem to enhance tenderness...The majority of these animals were marketed through small, community-based packing plants, with the financial rewards for the production and marketing of the product remaining in the local economy (2).

In recent years there has been a resurgence of interest in pasture finishing among North American graziers. The monthly periodical *The Stockman Grass Farmer* is a forum for these new pioneers. Its editor, Allan Nation, proposes that producers of beef cattle begin to think of themselves as grass farmers, with pasture as their main crop. This is an idea whose time has come, though it is not a new idea. Nation quotes a classic reference book, *Forages*, published in 1951 by Iowa State: “The grassland farmers are often craftsmen in the culture and use of grass. [One] takes into account soils, plants, animals, and interrelationships. Adequate acreages of adapted grass-legume combinations are provided, depending upon soil needs. High quality forages are emphasized in livestock production, with grains supplementing

rather than dominating the feeding practices” (12). The term “grass farming” reflects the fact that high quality pasture is the prerequisite for healthy animals and healthy profits.

In 1997 The University of Missouri’s Forage Systems Research Center completed a five-year study “designed to research the finishing of beef cattle on pasture without the use of a confinement feedlot” (13). According to one of the researchers, animal scientist Fred Martz, “What will push [the practice of grass finishing forward] are people with environmental concerns. Pasture finishing won’t ever totally replace feedlot finishing, but if we get to a level of finishing 25% of cattle on pasture, it would be a significant change” (14). To repeat a point made above by Jay Nixon, the wants and needs of beef eaters—the producer’s immediate or ultimate customer—are worth considering. Who are those “people with environmental concerns” going to buy their beef from?

Pasture-finished beef (PFB) is lean beef. Sometimes it is finished entirely on pasture; sometimes there is a short period of grain-feeding (as in the case of Laura’s Lean Beef). The essential elements of high-quality PFB are high-quality pasture, appropriate genetics, young slaughter age, attention to factors that affect flavor, and aging of the carcass.

- **High-quality pasture.** “Bluegrass, orchardgrass, bromegrass, endophyte-free tall fescue with a 30–50% component of legume should be considered. Alfalfa should not be overlooked if your situation is suitable for it. Tall fescue with high levels of endophyte infection *will not work*. **We need animal gains of 2.0+ lbs. per day** and dirty fescue just won’t do it, particularly in the summer...Pastures should be kept vegetative—*no seedheads*—and 6–10 inches in height at turn-in” (15). Management-intensive rotational grazing and other resource-efficient grazing practices are recommended. Several ATTRA publications on rotational grazing and other grass-farming topics are listed in the **Resources** section. Also be sure to check with local Extension and NRCS agents.

- **Genetics.** Good forage-converting genetics is important. This means **fast-maturing breeds that tend to marble on pasture with a lower amount of backfat**. Ontario agronomist Ann Clark recommends using mainly medium-framed, early maturing British breeds (14). Smaller-frame British cattle are well-suited to direct marketing, as families may like the smaller carcass size and smaller cuts of meat. Research at the University of Missouri's Forage Systems Research Center found that medium-frame cattle that finish at 1050–1200 lbs. work well for pasture finishing (15). The researchers used Angus, Gelbvieh, and Hereford crosses. Brahman influence is important in the South for heat tolerance. It is important to note that large-frame cattle bred for feedlot finishing *will not work* for PFB.
- **Young slaughter age.** The most important issue related to **tenderness** of beef is the age of the animal at slaughter. Plan to have pasture-finished cattle **ready for slaughter at 16–22 months of age**. One “problem” associated with PFB that may be solved by slaughtering before 18 months is **yellow fat**. This is a problem due to public perception that beef fat should be white; it is not a true quality issue. The yellow color simply indicates a higher level of beta-carotene (precursor to vitamin A) in the fat of animals finished on forage. “Yellow fat on poultry and beef, extremely orange egg yolks and naturally yellow butter reflect high levels of chlorophyll in the diet and low levels of saturated fat” (16). A direct marketer who educates customers about yellow fat might turn it into an asset indicating a natural, nutritious food. In any case, the consensus among producers seems to be that if animals are slaughtered within the 18-month age range, fat will not appear yellow.
- **Flavor.** The taste of grass-fed beef differs from that of grain-fed beef, although the difference is most often subtle. Studies in Missouri and Alabama have found that consumers could not distinguish between grain-finished beef and beef finished on pasture. Still, **PFB has a reputation for tasting “stronger” than grain-finished beef**.

According to researchers at the University of California, “The flavor of the meat is directly linked to the feed available to the animal. The traditional grain-fed product has the advantage of a consistent feed that in turn produces a consistent-tasting product. Grass-fed beef, on the other hand, is reliant on the native forage available...The types of grass can vary from field to field creating a problem in flavor consistency of the meat” (2). Grain supplementation on pasture or a short period of grain feeding before slaughter can reduce or eliminate the “stronger” taste of grass-fed beef. Also, pastures should be managed to avoid plants, such as onions, that can impart an off-flavor. PFB is definitely not synonymous with “bad-tasting.” Members of the Tallgrass Beef cooperative in Kansas find that the flavor of their PFB is preferred by their clientele, which includes chefs (14).

- **Aging of the carcass.** While researchers in Missouri found no off-flavors in PFB, “the taste panel did detect a **lack of tenderness when the meat was tested right after slaughtering**.” The researchers re-tested the beef after it had been aged for one, three, and five weeks, and found that the **PFB aged three weeks was equal in tenderness to feedlot-finished beef**. A PFB producer in New Hampshire, who markets under his own label, allows his beef to hang four weeks. He feels that aging is very important to quality. Aging also contributes to the characteristic flavor associated with beef.

As noted earlier, the USDA grading system is based largely on marbling. Because of this, beef finished on pasture tends to grade relatively poorly. In a University of Georgia study that compared carcass quality of PFB and feedlot-finished beef, the USDA grades were split as follows:

**Grass-fed:** 15% Standard, 70% Select, 15% Choice

**Grain-fed:** 0% Standard, 45% Select, 55% Choice

The taste panels, however, detected no difference in *eating quality* between the two types of beef.

Canadian researcher Paul McCaughey comments, “The taste panel work we’ve done shows there are many factors affecting eating quality apart from marbling. In fact, USDA experiments have shown that marbling accounts for only about 5% of beef’s eating quality—yet marbling is what we base our entire grading systems on” (14).

It is clear that PFB sold conventionally under the present grading system will “take a price kicking—to the tune of \$220/head, or up to a 24¢/lb. discount.” However, this loss may be offset by cost-of-gain savings. The five-year research project in Missouri showed cost of gain for grass-finished cattle to be as low as \$27/cwt., compared to \$60/cwt. for feedlot cattle. Land, labor, interest, feed, and all other variable costs were included (14). The Missouri researchers concluded that “cattle can be finished on pasture and the resulting beef will be acceptable for the conventional meat trade...The use of maximum inputs of pasture into the finishing of beef will usually result in the most economic gains as long as cattle are taken to a level of finish to grade Choice and/or Select and market discounts are avoided” (13). But until the conventional market learns to deal rationally with PFB, alternative marketing structures are better suited to this premium product. Rather than being graded and sold on the hoof, PFB is typically custom-processed and direct-marketed to consumers.

There is plenty of evidence that grass-finished beef is more nutritious and healthful than grain-fed beef, and the case is presented definitively by Jo Robinson in her recent book, *Why Grassfed Is Best*. All PFB producers should read this book, and then use it as a reference for educating customers. See **Resources** for ordering information.

### Direct marketing

Before beginning an alternative marketing enterprise, it is crucial to understand the differences between commodity marketing and direct marketing. Allan Nation, editor of *Stockman Grass Farmer*, has stated,

A commodity orientation means that as long as you meet the specs and can stand the price you pretty much tell everyone else to go fly a

kite. Such a selfish attitude absolutely will not work in direct marketing...In the U.S., consumers expect an attitude of deference and responsiveness to their wants and needs. If you are unable or unwilling to develop—or convincingly fake—such an attitude, stay in commodity-priced agriculture. However, if you see service to others as a noble calling, don't let the lack of specific marketing or production skills deter you. Aptitudes are rather easily learned. It is our attitudes that are difficult to change and that most often determine our fate (17).

Direct marketing brings the producer and the consumer together in a way that the mass market cannot, and this is its greatest strength and advantage. Direct marketing is “relationship marketing.” The first step in building the relationship is identifying your customers, who will not be “just anybody.” Your customer base will consist of folks who desire a special product, and their needs should be your first consideration, *before* you actually develop your product. First, talk to potential customers one at a time. Find out what characteristics they value most in a premium beef product—high quality, low price, leanness, organic or “natural” production, home delivery, particular cuts, and so on. Develop a brand name and a marketing/packaging strategy that capture the most important of these elements and preview your “brand” to your intended customers.

When you feel you have the right combination to appeal to your niche market, *then* develop the actual product. This approach can conserve resources, including your limited capital. It is both risky and inefficient to develop a product first and *then* try to find a market for it. Remember that the “product” is much more than the beef itself; the product is also service, packaging, your farm’s identity, your production philosophy, and even price. For your product to stand out from the competition and attract repeat customers, it must be carefully differentiated from other types and brands of beef. Take time in developing your beef product and working the kinks out of the production process. Begin by making the product for yourself and your family. Next, produce it for your friends

who have tried it, liked it, and asked for it. The last step should be marketing to consumers. Allan Nation writes, “If you are considering getting into direct marketing, don't bet the farm on it. Keep doing what you are doing for a living and start learning and experimenting on a small scale...[T]he best guinea pig for this period of trial and error is yourself, your family and your friends.” If your family and friends are not crazy about your grass-fed steaks and don't request more, “you are still in your apprenticeship period and are not yet ready to be in business.” Don't try selling anything that you yourself are not completely satisfied with. “A new business needs virtually 100% customer satisfaction from day one to survive. This is because any new business is necessarily drawing from a very small customer base” (17).

The authors of the University of California study, *Natural Beef: Consumer Acceptability, Market Development and Economics*, recommend transferring only a portion of your cattle production into the new system at first. This will give you an opportunity to learn the ups and downs of alternative marketing while putting only a small percentage of your income at risk. Diversify your production a portion at a time, increasing the number of animals in the new system as you develop retail skills and market connections (2).

While you have “relationship marketing” on your side, the major beef packers have economy of scale on theirs. Since you will not be able to compete with mainstream beef producers in terms of price, you must determine the appropriate premium to place on your product. Pricing is a critical and difficult task, and underpricing is a common pitfall. The price has to cover costs of production, re-capitalization of the enterprise, *and* an acceptable profit. Profit should be planned for at the outset. If profit is thought of as “whatever is left over” there will probably be no profit. At the same time, an over-priced product will not sell. Your initial market research should determine market size, market share, and the price your niche consumer is willing to pay for premium beef. Is that price sufficient to make this a profitable venture?

Joel Salatin, a nationally recognized grazier in Virginia, has been very successful at raising and marketing pasture-finished beef. He gains \$200-\$300/head net by direct marketing to 400 regular customers (16). His book *Salad Bar Beef* presents a proven production and marketing system “that can make an excellent profit from a small cow herd regardless of the commodity price of calves.” “Salad bar beef” is Salatin's consumer-friendly term for lean, healthy, tasty meat raised locally on fresh, high-quality pasture. Salatin describes a three-pronged approach to developing a clientele for this type of beef:

- **1) Samples.** “We knew that the only way to get people to buy salad bar beef was to get it into their mouths. We gave samples to anyone we thought might be interested. Over the years, we've never given anything away that didn't come back fourfold...Free samples are one of the underpinnings of successful marketing. We found a tremendous prejudice to non-grain beef. People by and large just knew it would be tough, stringy and gamey. To overcome that, we had to introduce them to it without any risk. The response has always been tremendous to this technique.”
- **2) Education.** “We put together a slide program about our farm, titled it ‘Environmentally Enhancing Agriculture’ or whatever the group wanted to call it, and began making presentations for local organizations” such as Rotary, Kiwanis, Women's Clubs, Garden Clubs, and American Association of Retired Persons (AARP). “The program is educational, not a sales pitch. But at the end, quite innocently, I'll say, ‘Now if any of you would like to participate in this type of agriculture, I happen to have some order blanks with me and you're welcome to sign up.’”

Other educational methods include brochures, newsletters, newspaper articles, and one-on-one conversations. It is up to you to educate potential customers on how and why your beef is *different* and *better* than the conventional product. Education should include instructions on proper cooking as well. Salatin points out that the common fast-cooking methods are suited to marbled USDA Choice, but not to grass-fed lean beef. He recommends slow cooking his beef for the best taste, greater tenderness, and improved digestibility.

- **3) Customer Appreciation.** This gets to the heart of “relationship marketing.” When the consumer

knows and trusts the producer personally, the relationship built between them is not easily broken. Good sellers know and use their customers' names. Loyalty helps bring in repeat customers. The greater the loyalty and satisfaction, the higher the likelihood of repeat business even though beef may be available at the grocery store at a cheaper price. "The two things supermarkets cannot do is provide high-quality food and offer a relationship." By giving detailed, personal service to his customers, Salatin ensures that they will spread the word about his product (16).

*Salad Bar Beef* is recommended reading for anyone considering alternative beef marketing. It covers both production and marketing topics, all from the perspective of a successful alternative beef operation. See the **Resources** section for ordering information.

Salatin sells his beef and other farm products direct from the farm, taking orders once a year by mail and phone. Other potential outlets for direct sales to consumers include farmers' markets and local grocery or health food stores interested in carrying farm-fresh products. Stores, however, are usually uninterested unless you can ensure a steady supply.

Finer restaurants constitute another possible outlet. Many chefs appreciate the flavor and freshness of locally raised, grass-fed beef. Some restaurants have developed informational packets on where their ingredients come from, "to build rapport with customers and set the restaurant apart from other dining experiences" (2). Quality and consistency will be this market's main concerns. Chefs may be interested in prime cuts as the majority of their purchase, making it necessary to develop other marketing outlets for hamburger and roasts. Marketing to restaurants may provide the greatest return on investment for primal cuts, but is generally smaller in volume and requires more work per unit of sales (2).

Taking your operation from live sales to marketing of meat may require changes in your production focus. Inventory management will be a primary issue. Beef producers who have had a short calving and marketing period for the sake of efficiency may have to time production to match variable consumer demand. Restaurants

often have a highly variable demand for product, so that you may either have to carry inventory or be able to move products quickly from live to useable form. Selling directly to consumers as Salatin does could allow you to focus on seasonal production. Freezing beef increases the ability to manage inventory, but adds storage charges to the cost of production. Generally, the larger the scope of your enterprise and the more outlets you have, the less challenging inventory management will be (2).

This section is intended only as an introduction to some aspects of direct marketing of beef. ATTRA's *Direct Marketing* publication provides more detailed information on enterprise evaluation, marketing research and planning, promotion and publicity, pricing and profitability, and direct market alternatives. Also refer to the **Resources** section of the present document, which includes sources of information and assistance for creating a small business, as well as contact information for beef producers who direct-market. *Your best resource for information and inspiration is fellow producers, whose experience can save you many surprises and missteps.* For a small-scale producer's firsthand account of the direct-marketing "learning curve," see the enclosure "Direct Marketing Farm-Raised Beef" by Lisa Cone Reeves.

### **Legal Considerations**

Marketing activities are affected by a wide variety of laws and regulations at federal, state, county, and city levels. While regulations vary by type of enterprise and location, there are some general rules to be aware of in all areas of direct marketing. Some of these legal considerations include the type of business organization (sole proprietorship, partnership, etc.), zoning ordinances, small business licenses, building codes and permits, weights and measures, federal and state business tax issues, sanitation permits and inspection, food processors' permits, and many, many others. If you plan to employ workers, there will be still more requirements to meet, such as getting an employer tax identification from the IRS and getting state workman's comp insurance. Environmental laws are also becoming increasingly important to farmers.

Always check with local, state, and federal authorities before trying to market any food product. Processed foods are heavily regulated to protect public health. Stay informed, since rules and regulations change often, and keep good records to prove that you're in compliance.

Adequate insurance coverage is essential. “The closer you get to the consumer direct marketing, the higher the liability risk” (2). Insurance that every operator should have includes liability insurance for your product and your premises, employer's liability insurance to protect you if employees are injured, and damage insurance to protect against loss of building, merchandise, and other property. General comprehensive farm liability insurance often does not cover on-farm marketing or direct marketing operations. See **Resources** for information on *The Legal Guide for Direct Farm Marketing* by Neil Hamilton of Drake University Law School, a comprehensive primer on the many legal issues that surround direct marketing of agricultural products.

### Processing and packaging

Processing is an important consideration for direct marketers. Custom facilities are generally cheaper to use. Large commercial, federally inspected plants may not be geared to do custom butchering for the small beef producer. Producers should contact their state department of agriculture for regulations about meat processing and sale to the public.

Beef must be slaughtered and inspected at a federal- or state-approved facility in order to be sold to individuals, as in the freezer beef trade, or to restaurants. If beef is processed at a custom facility that is not federally or state inspected, then it can only be sold prior to slaughter (15). This means the cattle must be sold by the head or by liveweight, which doesn't account for wide variations in dress-out percentages between animals. Joel Salatin deals with this dilemma by selling his animals for \$1 per head and then adding shipping and handling charges based on carcass weight. However, we cannot recommend this practice. The liability risk involved should not be underestimated.

Producers considering constructing their own slaughtering and processing facility should remember that it is very important to comply with federal, state, and local regulations for processing—the axiom “ignorance is not an excuse” applies here. Farmers who intend to process on-farm should be aware of all federal, state, and local regulations. Your state departments of agriculture and health will have information about regulations. Your county Extension office should be able to direct you to the county agencies that regulate zoning, health, and other local regulations.

In 1996, the USDA's Food Safety and Inspection Service (FSIS) announced implementation of new rules meant to ensure the safety of meat products.

A major component of the regulations is the Pathogen Reduction/Hazard Analysis and Critical Control Points (HACCP) system. FSIS works with small and very small processing plants to make sure they comply with the HACCP. All facilities must comply by January 25, 2000. To learn more about HACCP mandates, or to obtain copies of FSIS-developed models for designing HACCP-compliant small facilities at the least cost, contact FSIS (see **Resources** for contact information).

Retail and individual meat sales require packaging in accordance with state food laws. Since good packaging enhances sales, label design and presentation are important. Vacuum packaging provides superior product protection

#### Production Note: To castrate or not to castrate?

Some producers who direct-market do not castrate their bulls (producers who market conventionally do castrate since they get docked for intact males). Bulls put on weight 17% faster than steers and make leaner gains, giving them a higher dressing percentage. However, they may need to be slaughtered young (by 18 months) to minimize gristle, and run in a separate herd to prevent unplanned breeding. But separating the herd may not be convenient. Joel Salatin, for example, chooses to castrate so that he can run all his cattle in one herd.

as compared to hand-wrapping. Feeding high

levels of Vitamin E for two weeks prior to slaughter increases the shelf life of meat (2).

### Cooperatives for alternative beef marketing

Co-op marketing can be adapted to alternative markets. A great example is the CROPP cooperative, which markets certified organic dairy, eggs, produce, and meats nationally under its "Organic Valley" brand name. Formed in 1988, CROPP is now the largest producer of organic dairy products in the U.S. Among the more recent additions to their product line is pasture-finished beef. CROPP is a farmer-owned and operated marketing cooperative, consisting of over 190 small to mid-sized family farms in 10 states, from Maine to Washington. See the **Resources** section for contact information. For another example, read the enclosed article profiling a producers' marketing co-op in Kansas that specializes in "all natural" beef.

### Conclusion

The shortcomings of the conventional marketing system have made the time ripe for a return to marketing beef directly from ranches to consumers. Niche marketing can give the farmer a larger share of the food dollar and a higher return on each unit sold. Adding value or marketing some minimally processed farm products directly to the consumer is a way of enhancing financial viability. While successful direct marketing may or may not increase profits, it will provide protection from fluctuating live-market prices. However, direct marketing is a labor-intensive job demanding time and effort, creativity, ingenuity, sales expertise, and the ability to deal with people in a pleasant and positive manner. Producers must be absolutely sure they are ready for the job.

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Wulf, Duane N. 1999. Did the locker plant steal some of my meat? The Shepherd. January. p. 12-13.

### **Resources**

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#### **Conventional Marketing:**

##### *Cowboy Marketing*

*A Primer On Cattle Marketing Practices That Will Increase Your Bottom Line*

By Jay Nixon. 1995. 135 p.

*Available for \$10.95 plus \$2 shipping (TX residents add \$0.90 tax). Make check payable to:*

Cowboy Marketing

302 E. Buchel

Karnes City, TX 78118

(830) 780-2455

*Managing for Today's Cattle Market and Beyond*

<http://ag.arizona.edu/arec/WEMC/>

Today'sCattlePub.html

*A collection of 36 Extension reports relating to all aspects of today's conventional cattle market, put together by the Western Extension Marketing Committee. Topics include retained ownership, cooperatives, the cattle market environment, developing a market plan, comparing your market opportunities, and many others. Adobe Acrobat Reader is required to view this document on-line. Print copies (125 pages in a binder) are available for \$20 each from:*

Chris Bastian

Box 3354 University Station

University of Wyoming

Laramie, WY 82071

(307) 766-4377

e-mail: [bastian@uwyo.edu](mailto:bastian@uwyo.edu)

#### **Alliances/Cooperative Marketing:**

USDA Rural Development/ Cooperative Services  
Stop 3250

Washington, D.C. 20250-3250

Telephone: (202) 720-7558

e-mail: [coopinfo@rurdev.usda.gov](mailto:coopinfo@rurdev.usda.gov)

<http://www.rurdev.usda.gov/rbs/coops/cswhat.htm>

*The goal of the Cooperative Services program of USDA's Rural Business-Cooperative Service (RBS) is to help rural residents form new cooperative businesses and improve the operations of existing cooperatives. To accomplish this, Cooperative Services provides technical assistance to cooperatives and those thinking of forming cooperatives. It also conducts cooperative-related research and produces information products to promote public understanding of cooperatives.*

#### *Alternative Marketing Programs*

Cattle Fax. 1998. 39 p.

*This report focuses on the economics of marketing through alliances, and explains the formulas and grids used in determining price premiums and discounts. Includes a listing of a number of alliances, with contact info and specifications (some of which may be outdated by now. Ask Cattle Fax about updates of this publication.) Available for \$20 from:*

Cattle Fax

PO Box 3947

Englewood, CO 80155

(303) 694-0323

(800) 825-7525

e-mail: [cfax@cattle-fax.org](mailto:cfax@cattle-fax.org)

<http://www.cattle-fax.com/>

## Niche and Direct Marketing:

### *Alternative Meat Marketing*

This free ATTRA publication is a comprehensive introduction to producer-marketing of meat products. Pitfalls, producing and packaging for quality and consistency, direct marketing options, value-added products, food safety and labeling, niche markets, resources.

### *Direct Marketing*

This free ATTRA publication covers the importance of marketing, market research, niche marketing, value-added marketing, pricing, promotion, and more, and includes a list of further resources. Contact ATTRA for a free copy.

### *Natural Beef: Consumer Acceptability, Market Development, and Economics*

by Annette Levi, Dave Daley, Steve Blank, and Glenn Nader UC SAREP 1996-97 Research and Education Report. Available on-line at:  
<http://www.sarep.ucdavis.edu/grants/reports/nader>

*For a print copy of this report, contact:*  
Glenn Nader  
University of California Cooperative Extension  
142-A Garden Highway  
Yuba City, CA 95991  
(530) 822-7515  
e-mail: [ganader@ucdavis.edu](mailto:ganader@ucdavis.edu)

### *Salad Bar Beef*

By Joel Salatin. 1995. 368 p.

*Available for \$35 plus s/h from:*  
Fertile Ground Books  
P.O. Box 2008  
Davis, CA 95617-2008  
(800) 540-0170; (530) 297-7879  
e-mail: [books@agribooks.com](mailto:books@agribooks.com)  
<http://www.agribooks.com>

### *The Legal Guide for Direct Farm Marketing*

By Neil D. Hamilton. 1999. 235 p.

*An up-to-date, well-written primer on all the legal considerations related to direct marketing of agricultural products. Underwritten by a USDA SARE grant. Includes a chapter on marketing of meat. Available for \$20 from:*  
Drake University Agricultural Law Center  
2507 University Avenue  
Des Moines, IA 50311-4505  
(515) 271-2065

*Emerging Markets for Family Farms: Opportunities to Prosper Through Social and Environmental Responsibility*  
Center for Rural Affairs. 1997. 45 p.

*This report presents strategies for farmers to market high value products. It contains results from a national survey describing what it takes to be successful, barriers to overcome, products with the greatest potential, and how to develop markets.*

*Available for \$7 from:*

Center for Rural Affairs  
101 S. Tallman Street  
PO Box 406  
Walthill, NE 68067  
(402) 846-5428; Fax: (402) 846-5420  
e-mail: [info@cfra.org](mailto:info@cfra.org)  
<http://www.cfra.org>

### *USDA Farmer Direct Marketing Website:*

<http://www.ams.usda.gov/directmarketing>

*A national directory of farmers markets, list of upcoming conferences, a direct market newsletter and resources by state.*

Starting in 1999, the USDA's Agricultural Marketing Service (AMS) has announced a plan to help small farmers sell their agricultural products directly to consumers. Within the next three years, the AMS will create new direct marketing networks and a one-stop information clearinghouse, as well as developing training and information programs for farmers market managers, and small farmers. The "Farmer Direct Marketing Action Plan is available from Errol Bragg at (202) 720-8317, or on-line at:  
<http://www.ams.usda.gov/directmarketing/frmplan.htm>

## **Organic Beef:**

### *Organic Certification.*

This free ATTRA publication covers legal requirements, new federal standards, types of programs, and a comprehensive listing of state, national, and international certifying organizations. Contact ATTRA for a free copy.

National Organic Program, USDA  
Ted Rogers  
202-205-7804  
<http://www.ams.usda.gov/nop>

### *The National Organic Directory*

Community Alliance with Family Farmers

*An annually updated, 400-page "yellow pages" of the organic industry. Includes over 1,000 listings of farmers, wholesalers, farm suppliers, support businesses, certification groups and resource groups. Organic commodities bought and sold are extensively indexed, and explanations of state and federal organic laws are provided. Costs \$47.95 (plus \$3 shipping. California residents add \$3.48 sales tax.)*

CAFF

P.O. Box 363

Davis, CA 95617

(800) 852-3832

<http://www.caff.org>

### *Upper Midwest Organic Livestock Producers Directory*

Cooperative Development Services. 1999. 76 p.

*Intended for livestock producers in Iowa, Minnesota, North and South Dakota, and Wisconsin. The Directory contains contact names, addresses and phone numbers for meat processing facilities, certification agencies, producer cooperatives, publications, etc. Order for \$5 (shipping and handling included) from Cooperative Development Services. Call for their complete publication list.*

Cooperative Development Services

30 West Mifflin Street, Suite 401

Madison, WI 53703

(608) 258-4396; Fax: (608) 258-4394

e-mail: [darcyilk@inxpress.net](mailto:darcyilk@inxpress.net)

### **Pasture-Finished Beef & Grass Farming:**

The following ATTRA publications are available free of charge:

- *Sustainable Beef Production.* Grazing and feeding options, low-stress handling, alternative parasite control.
- *Beef Farm Sustainability Checklist.* Assessment tool to help plan a whole farm in which beef production is a major enterprise. Management of animals, forage, soil, watershed, marketing, economics and goal-setting are addressed in the 200 questions.
- *Rotational Grazing.* How to manage pastures and grazing animals to more profitably utilize the farm's resources.
- *Sustainable Pasture Management.* Managing fertility and pests, grazing systems, conserved forages, maintaining productivity, additional resources.

- *Nutrient Cycling in Pastures.* Examines elements of pasture ecology, including soil organisms, plants, and animals. Discusses their interactions and ways to enhance nutrient cycling with minimal losses to air or ground and surface waters.
- *Meeting the Nutritional Needs of Ruminants on Pasture.* Impact of grazing management on nutrition, supplemental feeding on high quality pasture, feed profiling, feed budgeting, matching livestock and forage resources for efficient pasture use.
- *Matching Livestock and Forage Resources in Controlled Grazing.* Grazing objectives, maintaining botanical balance, encouraging rapid growth, compromising between yield and quality, minimizing mowing, producer goals.
- *Introduction to Paddock Design and Fencing-Water Systems for Controlled Grazing.* Basics of paddock design, considerations in fencing and water technology, enclosures.
- *Assessing the Pasture Soil Resource.* How to take a soil sample and an easy way to assess soil biological activity and water infiltration. Assessment sheet included.

American Farmland Trust

<http://www.grassfarmer.com>

*American Farmland Trust's information site on grass-based farming systems. Grassfarmer.com brings online visitors information on a variety of topics related to grazing and grass farming. Be sure to check out the many links to further grazing information on-line.*

*Why Grassfed Is Best*

by Jo Robinson. 1999. 107 p.

*Available from the following address for \$7.50 a copy, plus \$2.50 s/h (WA residents add 8.4% sales tax). Discounts for orders of two or more copies. Make checks payable to Columbia Media.*

Columbia Media

2401 N. Cedar

Tacoma, WA 98406

(206) 463-4156

The Stockman Grass Farmer

P.O. Box 2300

Ridgeland, MS 39158-2300

(601) 853-1861

*Published monthly. \$28/1 year; \$50/2 years. The following books by SGF editor Allan Nation are*

*available from the magazine. Call the number above for prices and ordering information.*

*Pasture Profits with Stocker Cattle.* 1992. 192 p.

*Paddock Shift: Changing views on grassland farming.* 1997. 184 p.

*Grass Farmers.* 1993. 192 p.

### **Processing and Labeling:**

USDA/FSIS/OPPDE  
Animal production Food Safety Staff  
1400 Independence Ave, SW  
Washington, D.C. 20250-3700  
(202) 690-2683  
<http://www.usda.gov/agency/fsis>

### **HACCP Implementation:**

<http://www.fsis.usda.gov/OA/haccp/imphaccp.htm>  
HACCP hotline: (800) 233-3935  
e-mail hotline: [Haccp.Hotline@usda.gov](mailto:Haccp.Hotline@usda.gov)

### **Alternative Beef Producers/Marketers:**

CROPP Cooperative/Organic Valley  
507 W. Main St.  
La Farge, WI 54639  
(888) 444-6455  
<http://www.organicvalley.com>

Polyface, Inc.  
Joel Salatin  
Rt. 1 Box 281  
Swoope, VA 24479  
(540) 885-3590

Laura's Lean Beef  
2285 Executive Drive  
Suite 200  
Lexington, KY 40505  
1-800-487-5326  
e-mail: [llb@laurasleanbeef.com](mailto:llb@laurasleanbeef.com)  
<http://www.laurasleanbeef.com>

Coleman Natural Products, Inc.  
5140 Race Court  
Unit 4  
Denver, CO 80216  
1-800-442-8666  
<http://www.colemannatural.com>

Alaska Natural Beef  
Bering Pacific Ranch  
(888) 384-5366  
<http://www.alaskanatural.com>

Van Wie Natural Foods  
6798 Route 9  
Hudson, NY 12534  
(518) 828-0533  
<http://www.vanwienaturalmeats.com>

Ervin's Natural Beef  
128 E. 19<sup>th</sup> Street  
Safford, AZ 85546  
(520) 428-0033  
<http://www.ervins.com>

Lasater Grasslands Beef  
Matheson, CO 80830  
(719) 541-2855  
e-mail: [lasater@rmi.net](mailto:lasater@rmi.net)  
<http://www.lasatergrasslandsbeef.com>

Homestead Healthy Foods  
Rt. 2 Box 184-A  
Fredericksburg, TX 78624  
(830) 997-2508

***Some producers and marketers of natural and grass-fed beef products who are willing to share information:***

Debbie Hawkins  
Saguaro-Juniper Natural Beef  
P.O. Box 1884  
Benson, AZ 85602  
(520) 212-4769

Tom & Martha Mewbourne  
Thorntree Farm  
Route 2 Box 776A  
Nickelsville, VA 24271  
(540) 479-3057

Rob & Alanna Reed  
Overlook Farm  
233 Spruce Rd.  
Karns City, PA 16041  
(724) 756-0540

Mike, Jennifer & Johanna Rupprecht  
Earth-Be-Glad Farm  
RR 2 Box 81  
Lewiston, MN 55952  
(507) 523-2564

David Schafer & Alice Dobbs  
Schafer Farm  
56 SW 52<sup>nd</sup> Ave.  
Trenton, MO 64683  
(660) 359-6545

Dennis & Brenda Wohlgemuth  
Box 2, Site 6, RR #1  
Crooked Creek, Alta.  
Canada T0H 0Y0

Kent & Lisa Shipe  
Rt. 1 Box 423  
Mathias, WV 26812  
(304) 897-5136

The electronic version of **Alternative Beef Marketing** is located at:  
<http://www.attra.org/attra-pub/beefmark.html>

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