

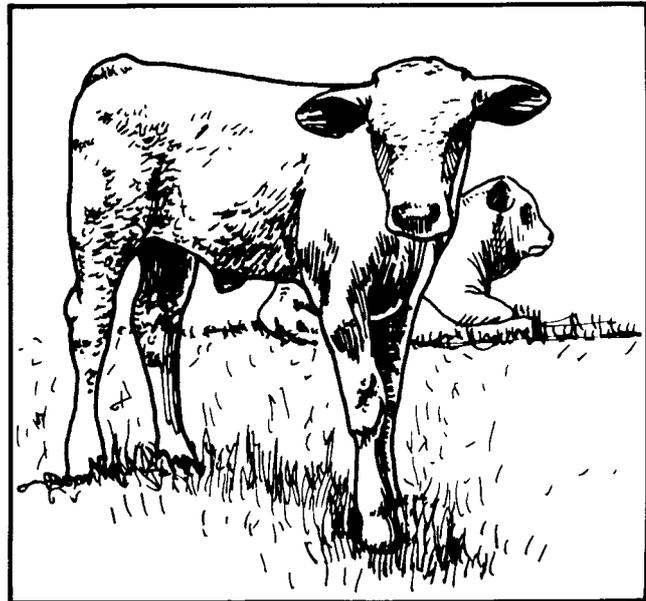
three months of age, because steers usually bring higher prices than bulls when sold and the operation is less stressful on younger calves.

Calves will be larger at weaning if implanted with a growth promoting agent, either Zeranol or estradiol 17 β , which are placed under the skin of the ear. Your County Extension Agent can help you decide about this practice. Other implants increase weight gains in older calves, but Zeranol, sold under the name Ralgro, or estradiol 17 β , sold as Compudose, are the only ones which can be used in calves under 400 pounds.

Creep feeding is another means of weaning heavier calves in which you provide extra feed to the calves which the cows don't get. A gate with openings about 17 inches wide and 40 inches high will let the calves through and keep the cows out. In a creep system you can either feed a grain mix or have a top quality forage growing where the calves can graze it. This is called creep grazing and works very well with a small acreage of good forage like alyceclover or millet. Creep feeding a grain mix does produce heavier calves but the feed often costs more than the value of the extra pounds.

Calves can be weaned away from their mothers at six to eight months of age. Before weaning, train the calves to eat feed so they will eat it well when they can't have milk any more. A good plan might be to vaccinate all calves for blackleg and malignant edema, and heifers for brucellosis at about six months of age and then wean them one month later. Don't do both at once because it's too much stress on the calf.

To wean calves simply take them away out of sight of their mothers and give them pasture or hay, a little feed and plenty of water. Both the mothers and



their calves will bawl a lot but this only lasts a couple of days. Keep the calves eating well and after a week or so they could be put out on quality pasture if you don't want to feed them or sell them right then.

Marketing calves in Florida usually involves taking them to an auction market and selling them. Auctions are located throughout the state and charge a small commission on each calf they sell for you.

Another option is to find a buyer for your calves and sell direct. If there is a feedlot or cattle buyer nearby, you might want to talk to them about buying your calves directly from your place. This could save you the auction commission and cause less stress on your calves by moving them directly to the buyer's place.

Prices are usually higher in the spring and lower in late summer and early fall when more calves are for sale. You might want to plan on selling your calves in the spring to go after the better prices by either holding your fall weaned calves over the winter or by using a fall calving season so your calves are ready to wean in the spring.

Finishing for Slaughter

The other main alternative to a cow-calf production system is the feeding of weaned calves such as steers to slaughter weight, which is called "finishing" the animal. There is a popular 4-H project where youth finish out a steer and exhibit him at a steer show before selling him for slaughter. Finishing is often looked at as a way to be involved in producing beef and possibly get your beef into the freezer for less money than going to the supermarket. You don't need much room for steer feeding because most of his feed is a grain mixture you give him, not pasture. A lot big enough for a steer to get a little exercise is adequate. There are several things to consider in a finishing program.

Animal selection is the first decision and it is a critical one. Select an animal or animals which are healthy and of the breed you want. Different breeds are ready for slaughter at different weights with Angus steers ready at about 1,000 pounds, while Charolais need to be over 1,200 pounds. The smaller breeds like Angus and Hereford are probably better suited for the family freezer because of their smaller size. The carcass of a steer is about 60% of the live weight so an 800 pound steer yields a 480 pound carcass and approximately 320 pounds of packaged meat. A 1,000 pound steer yields 600 pounds and 400 pounds of packaged meat. One cubic foot of freezer space can hold about 40 pounds of meat.

There is no reason you can't feed heifers instead of steers. Heifers tend to grow slightly slower and finish at lighter weights than steers. A small breed