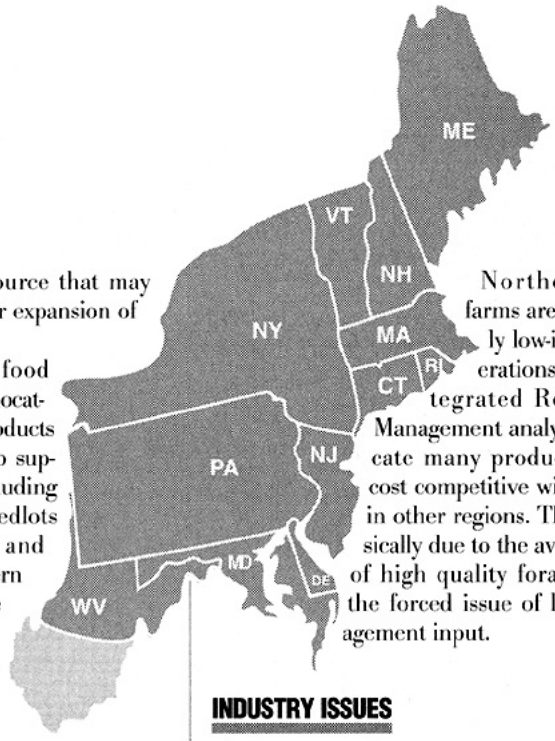
NORTHEAST



Beef production in the Northeast is a diverse business. Most beef farms in the region — Pennsylvania, New York, New England, Maryland, New Jersey and northern West Virginia — are classified as part-time enterprises with the primary manager working at a job off the farm. Statistics show herd size in the region is small; 90 percent with fewer than 50 cows. However, a recent survey of cattle owners in Pennsylvania indicates 86 percent use their cattle enterprise as a primary or secondary source of family income.

MATCHING CATTLE TO ENVIRONMENT

Weather conditions and temperature are seldom a deterrent to cattle production in the region. Granted, we have a short growing season in northern New York and Maine, and hot, humid conditions in parts of Delaware and Maryland. Still, most of the Northeast has relatively cool summers and moderate winters. This past winter's weather extremes were an exception. The major environmental problem for beef producers is mud, particularly during spring calving seasons and in feedlots.

FORAGE PRODUCTION

The region also supports extensive forage production. While soils in most areas cannot support extensive corn grain production, conditions exist to produce excellent pasture, alfalfa and corn silage crops. Also, a large dairy industry competes with the beef industry for feed grains and services. While this puts feedlots at a disadvantage, cow herds are well-suited to use the hay, crop residues and pasture not suitable for dairy production.

Pastures in many parts of the region are highly productive, with year-round stocking rates as low as three acres per cow. Western Pennsylvania and parts of West Virginia contain extensive acreage of reclaimed mining lands, a pasture resource that may hold the most potential for expansion of cow herds in those areas.

In addition, several food processing industries are located in the Northeast. Byproducts from these industries help support beef production, including Maine's potato crops, feedlots that use bakery wastes, and some producers in southern Pennsylvania who have added potato chips, fresh vegetable waste, and apple pomace to rations.

MANAGEMENT INPUT

A generally favorable environment implies there is a genetic or management ceiling on production. This has both positive and negative influences on the region's beef industry. Since breeders are free to make genetic decisions that result in wide variations of genotype and phenotype, most breeds of beef cattle are represented in the region. However, the largest number of purebred breeders are Angus. Larger commercial herds have successful crossbreeding programs. Lower management input due to off-farm employment has resulted in sire selection which generally favors low birth weights and easy calving.

Cattle breeders with limited management time and small herds are usually not willing to use breeding tools such as artificial insemination (AI) or the best genetics available because of increased costs. Diverse breeding programs have also spelled trouble in marketing feeder cattle in the region. Northeast feeder calf production suffers from discounted prices because of genetic variability, small production units, and distance to major cattle feeding areas. However, implementation of telemarketing programs in Virginia and West Virginia have helped improve the value of Northeastern calves.

Northeastern farms are generally low-input operations, and Integrated Resource Management analyses indicate many producers are cost competitive with those in other regions. This is basically due to the availability of high quality forages and the forced issue of low-management input.

INDUSTRY ISSUES

Two major packers serve the Northeast, Taylor Packing Company in Wyalusing and MOPAC in Souderton. Both rank in the top 15 nationally for slaughter of beef. Coupled with numerous smaller operations, the total daily kill capacity for all cattle in the region is about 4,000 head.

Because packers of this size find it difficult to compete with the Big Four, they also service several specialty products and markets. Recent consumer surveys have shown the Northeast to have a higher quality standard for beef compared to other regions. Due in part to servicing ethnic and white-tablecloth restaurant outlets for beef in the urban Northeast, this places well-marbled cattle at a premium. Smaller, specialty processors throughout the region help ensure competitive pricing on most beef cattle.

IN SUMMARY

The Pennsylvania cattle producer's survey results indicate that expansion plans are in place for many beef producers. Regional resources exist to support that expansion, particularly for pasture-based production. But part-time management constraints among the region's producers will make it necessary to use all of the genetic

BY DR. JOHN COMERFORD, ANIMAL SCIENCE PROFESSOR, PENNSYLVANIA STATE UNIVERSITY

and management tools available to help ensure future success.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

John Comerford has served as Extension beef specialist and associate professor at Penn State since 1987. He received his Ph.D. in animal breeding from the University of Georgia in 1987.

Comerford conducts Extension program and applied research programs for many phases of beef production. He serves on the National Integrated Resource Management (IRM) coordinating committee.

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COW COLLEGES

When breeders in the Northeast need up-to-date information or research reports on beef cattle production, they have a host of universities to call on. Many manage Angus herds at their beef experiment farms. Following is a list of recommended beef specialists:

UNIVERSITY OF CONNECTICUT — Storrs
Louis A. Malkus, Extension Beef Specialist
Department of Animal Sciences
(203) 486-2636

UNIVERSITY OF MASSACHUSETTS — Amherst
Jason Apple, Extension Beef Specialist
Department of Animal Sciences
(413) 545-2427

CORNELL UNIVERSITY — Ithaca, N.Y.
Ted Perry, Extension Beef Specialist
Department of Animal Sciences
(607) 255-5923

PENN STATE UNIVERSITY — University Park
Department of Animal Sciences
Erskine Cash, Extension Beef Specialist
(814) 863-3662
John Comerford, Extension Beef Specialist
(814) 863-3661

UNIVERSITY OF MAINE — Orono
Stacy Gunter, Extension Beef Specialist
(207) 581-2789; 1-800-287-7170, in state

UNIVERSITY OF MARYLAND — College Park
Scott Barao, Extension Livestock Specialist
Department of Animal Sciences
(301) 405-1394

UNIVERSITY OF NEW HAMPSHIRE — Durham
Department of Animal Sciences
(603) 862-3757

UNIVERSITY OF VERMONT — Burlington
Extension Office
Department of Animal Sciences
(802) 656-2990

GRASS FARMERS' FAVORITES

Very few native grasses remain in the populated Northeast region. Instead, you'll find a variety of cool-season grasses introduced from Europe and Asia as far back as the late 1700s and early 1800s growing in most pastures.

Eastern gamagrass, a high-protein perennial cousin to corn, was a common sight to early settlers in the eastern half of the United States, including major parts of the Northeast. It disappeared after Europeans settled here and allowed it to be overgrazed by their cattle and other livestock.

Non-native, cool-season grasses and high-protein legumes were selected and introduced for a reason, however, and have served Northeast farmers and their beef cattle well.

ORCHARDGRASS

Species: *Dactylis glomerata L.*
Life span: perennial
Season: cool
Growth form: bunchgrass

Orchardgrass

Where found:

Orchardgrass was introduced into the United States from Eurasia in the mid-1700s. It grows best on moist soils and intermixes well with other grass and legume species.

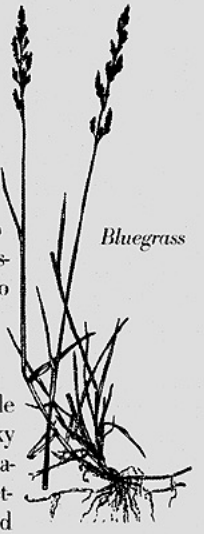
Uses and value:

Orchardgrass starts growth early in the spring. New, immature growth is highly palatable to cattle. However, it grows and matures rapidly. As it matures, palatability and nutritive value decline. To prevent this, it is hayed or grazed while actively growing. Periodic grazing in a rotation pasture program is the most effective way of maintaining a continuous yield of palatable forage.

This grass is shade tolerant, moderately heat and cold resistant, and establishes a stand rapidly. It doesn't tolerate prolonged drought periods. It produces best on fertile soils and responds well to nitrogen or natural fertilization.

BLUEGRASS (CANADA)

Species: *Poa compressa L.*
Life span: perennial
Season: cool
Growth form: sod-forming grass



Bluegrass

Where found:

This grass is a native of Eastern Europe. It was introduced to North America in the late 1700s. Best locations are bottomland pasture, hay meadows, sparse timber, waste areas and roadsides. Also commonly found in lawns. It requires adequate moisture.

Uses and value:

Canada bluegrass grows rapidly in the spring. It is very palatable and nutritious in the spring and fall. It matures later than Kentucky bluegrass, a grass with which it commonly grows intermixed. Canada bluegrass remains palatable through the summer and makes better hay than Kentucky bluegrass. Both are resistant to grazing and trampling, but recover slowly after grazing.