

Feeding for Hamburger Too Expensive, Says Meat Expert

Forget about feeding strictly to produce hamburger.

"Too expensive," concludes Del Allen, meats expert at Kansas State University. Allen says folks who talk about short-fed cattle strictly for hamburger just haven't done enough pencil pushing.

At the recent University of Nebraska feeders seminar, Allen outlined the economics of hamburger feeding—and came up with a production cost of \$1.43 per lb. Here's how he came to that level:

Start with a 600-lb. feeder steer at \$70 per cwt. = \$420.

Feed the steer for 90 days. Gains will run around 3.3 lb. per day or a total of 302 lb. for the feeding period at a cost of \$32.50 per cwt. = \$98.55.

Interest = \$11.58.

Processing Cost

Finally, figure the cost of getting that animal processed into hamburger = \$50.60.

Totaling those figures, Allen came up with a full cost of \$580 for that "hamburger" steer. But what happens when that animal is turned into hamburger? Here are the rest of Allen's figures:

Shrunk weight at packing plant: 888 lb.

Dressing percentage: 57%.

Carcass will weigh 506 lb.

Figure an 80% trim. Total hamburger production then will be 405 lb.

The final figures show 405 lb. of hamburger at a total cost of \$580—slightly over \$1.43 per lb. Allen also noted, "That figure does not include any profit for the retailer—and no merchandising cost."

He concluded, "You just can't do it."

Grind More Chucks

Instead, Allen suggested as cow numbers dwindle, we will grind more chucks from fed cattle to produce hamburger. He pointed out those chucks will produce a product that is 75 - 80% lean, depending on how the cattle are fed. It makes desirable ground beef.

Best of all, those chucks now are selling around 87¢ a lb. Allen estimates you could produce ground beef from chucks at \$1.09.

And he concluded, "That's a far better deal than the hamburger-type cattle."


What type of cattle will the beef industry need to turn out in the future? Allen took issue with experts who predict we will move toward heavier carcasses.

The Kansas expert pointed out the big slaughter and breaking plants have a tremendous investment in equipment. Right now, 950-1,350-lb. cattle fit their existing rail heights on the kill floor. And the cuts from those carcasses fit into boxed beef programs.

No Fast Change

Which led him to predict, "Those companies have a big investment in equipment, so we are not going to see any fast change in carcass sizes."

Future cattle will be leaner. Allen said the ideal is probably a yield grade 2. He feels YG-3s are still too fat for consumer demand.

He concluded by predicting, "We probably will continue to produce choice yield grade 2s—with steers weighing 1,200 lb. or less and heifers under 1,000 lb. We'll be producing that type of cattle for a long time in the future." 

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