



Bull



Cow



Calf

BEEF CATTLE

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Background Information

The word "cattle" comes from the Old French word "chattel" which means possession. It is believed that cattle were first domesticated in Europe and Asia during the Stone Age. The first cattle to graze Nebraska's grasslands belonged to soldiers at Fort Atkinson, which was established in 1819. Nebraska is among the top states in the number of cattle fed and sold to market. Cattle occupy two-thirds of all the grazing land in Nebraska.

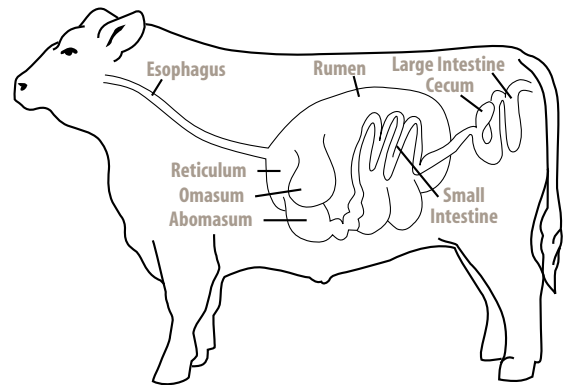
The United States and Australia are the top beef-producing countries in the world. There are many breeds of beef cattle. Hereford and Black Angus are among the most popular. Some cattle are crossbred, which combines the best traits of two or more breeds.

Growth and Feeding

Female cattle are called heifers. After they have given birth they are called cows. Male cattle are either bulls or steers. Bull calves that have grown to full maturity are capable of producing offspring. Steers are male cattle that have been neutered, much like a dog or cat, and are not able to reproduce. They do not become as large or aggressive as bulls.

A cow is pregnant for about nine months. She usually gives birth to one offspring, which is called a calf, but sometimes a cow may have twins. When a cow gives birth, it is called calving. Cows nurse their calves until they are about seven months old. Some heifer calves are kept in the herd to produce the next generation of calves. A heifer may have her first calf when she is two years old. Heifers that are not being kept for breeding will be moved to a feedlot until they are market-ready. Steers are also kept in a feedlot until they go to market.

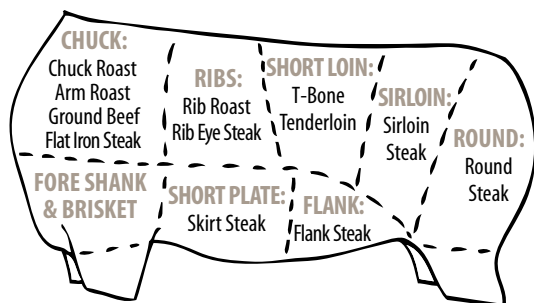
Cattle in the feedlot eat corn, alfalfa and silage. Their diets may also include crop by-products such as cotton seed hulls, corn stalks and sugar beet pulp. Even leftover bakery products can be ground and used as part of a balanced feed ration. Feedlot cattle are usually ready for market at 18 to 20 months of age and weigh between 1,100 and 1,400 pounds.



Ruminant Digestive System

Ruminant animals have a stomach with four compartments. They swallow food in large pieces into the first stomach compartment, bring the food back into the mouth and chew it again. This is called "chewing the cud." The food is swallowed again and moves through the four stomach compartments. Because they are ruminant animals, cattle can digest grass, roughage, food by-products and other materials people can't eat. They convert these otherwise unusable grasses and other products into nutrients for humans. Camels, deer, sheep and llamas are also ruminant animals.

Products



Cuts of Beef

Cattle provide cuts of meat such as steaks, roasts and ground beef (hamburger). A market beef that weighs 1,100 pounds will yield about 475 pounds of beef for a grocery store's meat case. The remaining parts of the beef are used in by-products.

Other Products

Meat from cattle is called beef. Cattle also produce a variety of by-products used in industrial, pharmaceutical and household items. Fats and gelatin are used to make soap, shampoo, cosmetics, desserts and many industrial products such as photographic film and light filters. The pancreas and liver are used for medicines for diseases such as anemia and hypoglycemia.

Hide, hooves and hair are used in products such as sports equipment, leather goods and paint brushes. A football, frequently called a "pigskin," is actually made from cow hide. The hide and hair from a beef animal weighs 100 pounds. In fact, it takes 3,000 cows to supply the National Football League with enough leather for a year's supply of footballs. Ninety-nine percent of every beef animal is used for meat or other products.