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Summer Feeding of Weaner Beef Steers

by

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It is a common practice in this State to market beef cattle as weaners and up to a year old, between November and February, thus avoiding the late summer and autumn period when cattle usually lose weight on normal paddock grazing.

Sometimes, for economic or other reasons, it is desirable to hold cattle over the summer for marketing later, and in such cases beef-raisers are faced with the problem of deciding whether the supplementary feeding of oaten grain would be warranted.

A fact-finding trial designed to provide information on this matter was carried out last summer at Cranmore Park.

BEEF CATTLE INVESTIGATIONS

The Department of Agriculture, in conjunction with the Australian Meat Board, is carrying out investigations dealing with the production and management of beef cattle at three centres in the agricultural areas, at Wokalup, Pardelup and at Cranmore Park, Walebing.

"Cranmore Park" is a well-known property owned by the Boolardy Pastoral Company and managed by Mr. Peter Lefroy. It is situated near Walebing in the Moora district and has an annual rainfall of about 17 inches.

THE FEEDING TRIAL

For the purpose of the trial, 30 cross-bred beef-type steers were used. They were March drop animals sired by Short-horn, Hereford and Aberdeen-Angus bulls and most of them were out of grade Aberdeen-Angus cows. They were weaned early in December, 1955, and at the end of the month were divided into two groups of 15.

From the beginning of January to mid-May, 1956 (about 18 weeks) one group received 5 lb. oaten grain per day, fed daily, in addition to paddock grazing; the other, the control group, had paddock grazing only. The groups were rotated between paddocks so that each group had similar grazing.

At the end of the oat-feeding period both groups were joined as one herd and had normal paddock grazing until sold at the end of September, 1956.

They were held after the expiration of the feeding period in May as it was decided to ascertain whether the group which received the grain supplement would continue to do better than the "grazing only" group under normal winter grazing conditions. All animals were weighed regularly throughout the trial.

SOME INTERESTING RESULTS

Several interesting facts emerged from the trial.

In the first place, the "grazing only" group did not lose weight over the summer period; in fact they gained an average of 68 lb. liveweight per beast over the 4½ month period or approximately ½ lb. per day.
This was partly due to the good paddock feed resulting from the excellent season in 1955 but was largely due to good pasture management.

Some of the pasture, plus an oat crop in the flowering stage, was mown and left lying in the paddocks—a practice which has been found to greatly enhance the nutritive value of the feed.

**OAT-FED GROUP SHOWED GREATER GAINS**

The group receiving 5 lb. of oats daily gained 108 lb. liveweight per beast—or 40 lb. more than the “grazing only” group. This gain however did not pay half the cost of the oats used and, in view of the labour costs of feeding the supplement, it was definitely uneconomic.

When the oat-feeding was discontinued, this group continued for two months to gain weight more rapidly than the “grazing only” group. They gained an average of 20 lb. liveweight more in the two months, but for the remainder of the period the liveweight gains were similar for both groups.

**SUMMARY**

The results of this trial over the conditions of last summer showed that during summer, feeding oat grain to beef weaner steers did not pay although weight increases were obtained. Also that liveweight gains during that period are possible without supplementary feeding by the provision of good quality paddock feed. Cutting pasture and cereal hay and letting it lie as cut, or windrowed, is a particularly valuable practice for providing high quality paddock grazing. This has been amply demonstrated with sheep at the research station and appears equally important with cattle. It has been a routine practice at Cranmore Park for a number of years now.

The trial will be repeated this summer. It will be interesting to see what happens after the present mediocre season instead of the very good season experienced last year.