



## Beef Production in the Midwest by Ernest weaver

The Midwest has long been known for quality beef production but profitable beef production has not been the automatic right of Midwestern farmers. Let's look at a bit of history and try to learn lessons that will help us produce quality beef at a profit.

My friend, Steve Wallace of Barenbrug USA, will tell us that in the 1950's and 1960's the Midwest not only finished most of the calves it produced but also **imported** cattle from the West! The 70's and 80's however, saw this scenario reversed. By the 90's many of our calves and the grain to feed them were being shipped to the West and Southwest. The Midwest was now known for quality feeder calves and also for some "sale barn junk". Today the number of fed cattle in the Midwest is on the rise again. We have the feed right here don't we?? Why not keep the industry here? Isn't finishing our own cattle a 'slam dunk' profit? Beware! Finishing cattle can be very profitable but if we are not prudent it can finish our bank account instead!

I would like to point out 4 mistakes many in the Midwest beef industry have made.

1. **Failure to provide quality pasture for brood cows and calves.** This has caused poor herd health, lousy conception rates, and light, stunted calves. Not only have we fed poor quality forage [especially hay] but also fed our cattle tons of poisoned feed. Ever hear of fescue toxicity?? Our pastures are the most used, most important part of our beef operations and yet too often they receive the least attention.
2. **Failure to provide quality feed in the July and August.** Our cool season pastures often are lacking in the middle of summer and many producers just let their cows stumble through the drought even though we have many options such as warm season annuals and perennials to keep our cows in top shape.
3. **Failure to provide quality feed in the winter months.** A diet consisting of mostly mature KY-31 Tall Fescue is what the majority of beef cows exist on from October through March. This is a tremendous help for loss of profits!
4. **Failure to provide the quality feed program for weaned calves.** Weaned calves need quality feed not unlike what a high producing Holstein cow needs. With a feed program like that, we can background calves efficiently even if we do not finish them.

There are a growing number of highly successful beef producers in the Midwest. What are they doing differently from the normal producers?

1. **They are taking or have taken definite steps to get rid of the chokehold of KY-31.** Tell me one good reason to feed toxin to any cow? There aren't any. These cattlemen are taking excellent care of their land. They maintain a better sod than most KY-31 farms have. They generally are raising the organic matter in their soil. They are better protectors of the land; more efficient in their use of resources.



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2. **These successful cattlemen use good grassland management.** They manage the production of pasture and hay ground as carefully as any cash cropper manages his corn. They use good grazing practices, fertilize judiciously, and do not abuse their pasture. They also use wisdom in selecting the right blend of forages for their current need.
3. **They keep good forage available to their cattle at all times.** Good cattlemen use a wide range of forages in pasture, hay, and stockpiled as the need arises because their cattle deserve more than “junk” forage.
4. **They use quality forage to “background” putting hundreds of economical pounds on their calves before selling them or finishing them.** A good back grounding program is low risk and is an easy way to have value added cattle.
5. **These cattlemen also manage waste with grazing management and good manure collection facilities turning this into a good fertilizer program.** The loss of animal waste on Midwest farm land had been one reason for the wide spread loss of soil organic matter.
6. **These cattlemen also often use quality forage to assist in an economical and safe finishing program for fat steers.** Cattle were created to thrive on forage. When we use quality forages the entire life of the cattle we tap into a resource that we will not improve on.