



CULL COW MARKETING

The first and probably the most important decision is to whether the dairy or suckler producer wants to add value to cull cows either by finishing cows themselves or by selling to a specialist feeder.

Whichever route you choose to take, certain questions must be answered from your knowledge of the individual cow:

- Is she in the best possible condition you have ever seen her in?
- Does she normally add more flesh with supplementary feeding?

Whether finishing the animal or selling for further feeding there is no point in doing it with cattle that you know will not respond to feeding.

Weighing of cows is an excellent management aid to maximising individual cow returns. Individual weighing will prevent incurring pointless price penalties for just failing to hit higher priced weight brackets.

Killing out percentages will vary from low 40 % for very poor leaner types up to 50% for the very best meated, well fed, neat, no gutted cows.

Always ask plenty of questions to build up a picture of how the animal has been performing.

1. How long has it been turned out to grass?
2. What has grass quality been like?
3. How long have they been housed?
4. What ration are they on, and how long?
5. What where they on before?
6. Are they putting condition on?
7. Will they put more condition on?

Five Simple Steps to Adding Value to Cull Cows

The first step to adding value to cull cows is to make sure that through either your *dairy farm assurance scheme* or a *beef assurance scheme* you become assured for cow beef production. On Meadow Quality's results for 2006, the difference between farm assured and non-farm assured outlets has been between 20 and 35p/kg, which equals to £60 - £105 per cow on a 300kg carcass. Meaning that the benefit from one cow could pay for the farm assurance inspection. By being farm assured, you are widening up the market opportunity for your product to the widest possible number of outlets, both for home and European trade. The one negative is that the processors that want farm assured cows tend to be serving the home multiple trade and therefore only want well fleshed P+ O- cows of fat class 3 or 4L they don't want under or over finished cows.

The **second** way to add value to your cows is once you have decided the animal is going to be called, have a strategy in place using a very simple checklist.

- Is this an animal that will put weight on?
If no, cull as soon as not economically producing milk.
If yes, proceed to finish and add value.
- Does the animal have any feet problems or any other recurring health issues that will stop it putting on weight?
If yes, send as soon as economical milk production ceases.
If no, proceed to finish and add value.

Once you have embarked on finishing a cow, monitor it regularly and as soon as it is in as good a condition as you have ever seen it, then look to market it.

This simple check list will ensure that you only try and add value to those cows that will give a profitable return for your investment.

The **third** step to adding value is being able to handle the animals regularly through a race to access levels of finish and fleshing, but also to weigh them if possible.

Being able to handle the cows means you can access their level of finish and make sure you don't market under or over finished animals. If under finished animals are sold then potential confirmation grade and carcass weight could be lost as well as full potential value. If over finished animals are sold (other than to very small niche markets) then not only is the carcasses devalued, but weight has been put on inefficiently. When assessing the overall finish of an individual animal, the key areas to observe or handle are:

- The brisket
- The flank
- The pin bone
- The rump
- The shoulder blade
- The loin
- The ribs

When assessing the overall conformation of an individual animal the key areas to consider are the shoulder, loin and leg. By building up a mental picture of the carcass from the information gathered from either observing or handling these key areas coupled to the knowledge of what type and quality of feed an animal is on and how long it has been on that regime, will help you decide on the likely positive contribution of internal fleshing and fat deposition.

The **fourth** step to adding value is once you have decided to further finish an animal, regularly monitor its progress and if it is not putting weight on efficiently assess why and if the situation can not be altered, market immediately.

The **fifth** and final step is making sure that the animals go to the outlet that will ensure the maximum return for you.

Meadow Quality Ltd

Newhouse Farm Business Centre, Langley Road

Edstone, Warwickshire, B95 6DL

Telephone 01789 734100 Fax: 01789 734199

VAT Reg GB 997 3240 79 Company Registration Number: 1238138

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