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Assembling and Distribution of 4-H Feeder Calves: Extension Circular 2-66-2

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ASSEMBLING AND DISTRIBUTION OF 4-H FEEDER CALVES

The demand for calves by 4-H club members for the beef feeding project is usually much greater than the local supply. Time and expense is saved by securing calves in numbers when it is necessary to leave the home county for them. During the last twenty years extension agents working with local committees have had a variety of experiences in the procedure and some acceptable methods have been developed.

The local situation should be considered first. In determining the number, class and quality of calves needed some leeway should be permitted. Here is where a sponsoring group comes in. This group should underwrite the program but they should take all possible precaution against unneeded risks. Numbers of calves should be estimated from desires indicated but club members should not be required to place specific orders. No club member should be required to take a calf he does not like. This gives the committee more leeway in buying and they usually need it for their selections will be based more on availability than on exercise of choice.

The sponsoring group may be the local extension organization, a local civic group, or several parents working together. The committee usually includes a member of the extension board, a man who knows cattle, a club leader and the extension agent. Sometimes a representative of the agency financing part of the members desires to work with the committee. Arrangements should be made for insurance all along the line from purchase of calves to delivery. It is available. Purchases may be made on a basis of delivery to some assembling point. Truckers should be checked for insurance; railroads have it. Expenses chargeable to the calves should not include anything more than transportation, sales costs, veterinary service, yardage and feed. Expenses of one or two members of the committee are properly chargeable to the sponsoring agency. This permits the individual project to be kept on a basis comparable to that of good business.

The source of most feeder calves will be the so-called range country, from breeders of purebred cattle and growers of commercial cattle. Good calves of any breed should be acceptable. Some individuals may wish outstanding individuals from herds having reputations for producing winners. Most committees will have to accept calves as they can find them at prices consistent with sound project work. Since project calves are selected on individual desirability, uniformity in group buying is not necessary and lack of uniformity often provides the opportunity for purchase. Breeders are not expected to sell prospective breeding stock, but frequently they have an occasional "catch" calf, a calf whose dam was too young to permit registration, or a calf with less desirable color markings. The commercial producer cannot be expected to top out his crop, but some times his crop is uneven due to widely varying calving dates. After he has shaped up his commercial lot he may have a few individuals that do not fit in. Usually they are the light end, or the younger calves, and they can be bought and left with their dams for thirty days or more after the sale of the crop. Again, there are very good small commercial herds with but one or two bulls. Sometimes these bulls are permitted to run with the herd the year around, and the calf crop is uneven but with fine small groups being ready for weaning at intervals.
Auctions are held regularly. During the peak of the fall run they are busy with carloads for the most part. One should not expect to top out these loads. After a week or two these sales have more smaller lots. Sometimes they permit selecting from small lots. Sometimes it is necessary to take a calf not desired to get another wanted. Sometimes advantageous purchases can be made by taking entire small lots and arranging to dispose of the undesired calves for commercial feeding. Every situation will usually require its peculiar adjustments calling for a play of business acumen. Enthusiasm may get the better of judgment. Once a course is determined it should be followed without indecision.

Caution should be taken with respect to disease. Respiratory diseases are those likely to be most serious. Pinkeye may be apparent and foot rot may be indicated by lameness, a swollen and hot foot. Lice, warts, ringworm and possibly mange may become apparent after reaching home but these are listed as usual risks and are difficult to avoid.

Several days may be needed in securing desired calves. Arrangements should be made for assembling them on the shipping date.

Since Nebraska range country is in the brand area, get a bill of sale in all private purchases and account sales from public sales. Be sure to get clearance from the brand inspector in either case. In private purchases, the seller should arrange for brand inspection. But get it.

To insure identification, a round, numbered ear sale tag should be placed in the right ear. It is attached by a hog ring placed in the top of the ear allowing the tag to hang inside. It is easily read as the calf faces one and is not easily lost. Another kind of tag is made of rubber and attached to the rump by cement.

Get railway stock car or truck that has been cleaned. Bed well to insure bedding from becoming sloppy wet. In handling calves do not allow them to become frightened or mad. Do not get them too warm. Allow no tail twisting in loading. Do not load heavily. It does not pay to crowd calves. Try to get rail shipments home in less than 36 hours to avoid unloading enroute.

Be prepared to receive shipment promptly on arrival. Provide a dry bed out of the wind but in the sunshine. Do not shut western calves up in closed buildings. Provide clean water and grass, preferably prairie hay. Let calves rest and fill for a day or so. A little bran and oats on the hay may start them to grain. Keep curious visitors away.

Distribution day may be a real event. Calves should be grouped, two to four in a small pen. Each calf should be appraised at a figure a little above his total cost. The method of distribution should be explained before sale time. For thirty minutes or so, club members (only), may claim (make their choice) calves. A higher bid succeeds a claim. At the end of the period an auction is held on one calf at a time to determine the final bidder. No bids should become settled until all calves have been claimed. At least all calves within some purchase groups should be claimed. After claiming and bidding is over, release may be given. All calves should be vaccinated against blackleg before release.

Settlement is made on percentage of total cost to total sales. If the calves cost $2000.00 and the total of the claims and bids total $2500.00, then each purchaser settles for $80% of his bid. This method of distribution has won approval after other methods, including drawing numbers from a hat, have failed. It permits
choice, it requires those who gain advantage to pay for it and it relieves the committee of anything to settle. Some calves will go for less than cost but this may enable some member to get in who otherwise may have to stay out, especially if he need be financed. Do not allow speculators to pick up these calves. Keep all calves for project work.

Each purchaser should be given a statement showing total purchase price and items of expenses making the total cost as well as the total of bids. For each individual calf the statement should identify the calf, give estimated or known birth-date and weight as well as bid and adjusted bid (settlement price). This statement provides the information for the start of the project record.