

PRACTICE

Canada's beef industry tends to be specialized and consists of two major components: the cow-calf producer, and the feeder. It should be noted that there are a significant number of producers that provide both the calf, and the finished animal ready for slaughter.

Approximately 5 percent of Canada's cattle population are purebred or seed stock animals. From this segment, highly selected breeding stock is developed for the commercial industry, primarily as herd sires.

The cow-calf segment of the industry is located mainly in western Canada. The established practice in commercial operations is to breed during June and July for calving in March and April. Calves are weaned at six to eight months and may then be sold for finishing or carried over for further grazing during the following summer. Cattle are usually wintered in the

shelter of trees, windbreaks or barns, and are fed hay or silage during the snow season which usually occurs during December, January and February in most areas.

Heifers are usually bred to calve at two or three years of age. The most favourable time for shipment of pregnant heifers is during October or November.

Weaned calves will weigh 230 kg (525 lb) at 6 to 8 months and are often introduced to heavy feeding at this age to finish for slaughter at 455–544 kg (1 000–1 200 lb) at 12 to 14 months. Calves which are carried through the winter months on hay and turned out for further grazing in the spring will weigh 363–455 kg (800–1 000 lb) at 17 to 19 months. For the Canadian meat trade these cattle are usually finished on grain for 90 to 120 days before slaughter at 544 kg (1 200 lb). A heavy fat cover is discouraged by the Canadian trade through a lower grade and price.

PERFORMANCE

High performance in beef cattle herds involves efficiency in reproduction and the conversion of fodder resources to beef. Improvement within a breed requires the gradual development of a superior genetic make-up to conform to these needs.

The traditional concept of animal breeding is the establishment, by individual breeders, of fixed desirable characteristics within a family or herd, using their own selective breeding techniques. This concept has been broadened in Canada by the adoption of a National Record of Performance (ROP) Program. This is a program sponsored by the federal and provincial departments of agriculture.

