

Backgrounding and Grazing of Beef Calves: A Demonstration in Western Iowa

RFR-A1874

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Introduction

This demonstration documented the 2018 backgrounding and grazing of a set of growing beef steers in western Iowa.

Materials and Methods

Steer calves (59 head) from the ISU McNay Research Farm's purebred Angus herd, born in the fall (August/September 2017), were backgrounded and grazed for 255 days in 2018 at the ISU Western Research Farm. The calves arrived March 26, 2018, and weighed 487 lb on average. They were offered free choice hay and a corn grain mix. From May 21 to October 10, the calves were grazed in a 48-acre smooth brome grass and legume pasture (143 days for 230 lb of gain or 1.61 lb/head per day) divided into paddocks. The calves were rotated as needed. Protein pellets carrying daily mineral needs and Rumensin were bunk-fed daily.

In the fall, the steers were placed in a drylot until November 16, 2018. The steers were moved to corn stalks and fall-planted cereal

rye from November 16 to November 28. The steers were moved back into drylot until moved to a feedlot for finishing December 5, 2018, when they weighed an average of 902 lb. The cattle were weighed at the beginning and end of the demonstration.

Results and Discussion

The 2018 grazing season was long due to frequent rains during the entire season and a late frost. Grass grew all season and was never in short supply for the grazing cattle. For the 143-day grazing period, the steers (supplemented with corn mix) gained 1.61 lb/day on average.

Over the entire 255 day backgrounding and grazing period, the 59 steers consumed 27.4 tons of feed (corn mix plus pellets), 53.3 tons of alfalfa/brome hay, and grazed 48 acres brome grass and legume pasture. On a per head basis, 929 lb of grain mix per head (3.6 lb/head per day), 1,807 lb of free choice hay/head (7.1 lb/head per day), and 0.81 acres of pasture/head were consumed. The resultant gain was 415 lb for 255 days or 1.63 average daily gain for the entire period (Table 1).

Table 1. Performance of backgrounded steers in western Iowa, 2018.

	Backgrounding performance
Start weight, lb	487
End weight, lb	902
Avg. gain/steer, lb	415
Background/graze days ^a	255
ADG ^b , lb/d	1.63

^aBackgrounding feed was free choice hay plus a grain mix fed daily.

^bADG = average daily gain.