

Column Name- The Heartland Minute

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*“Dietary Plan for Steers”*

Many people maintain a garden in the summer and enjoy eating the bounty of their homegrown produce. Similarly, cattle producers raise freezer beef for themselves and to share with family and friends. In the context of raising a steer, finishing means when the steer is reaching physiologic maturity, so they have adequate fat cover on them and they are also depositing intramuscular fat.

A finished steer will have about one-half inch of backfat over the rib, and their body condition score will be around eight or nine. With a starting weight of 850 pounds and a goal end weight of around 1,350 pounds, the steer will need to gain about 500 pounds in approximately 150 days. This marks about 5-6 months before the steer will be ready for processing.

With home-raised steers, you have to be a little more cautious than with feedlot animals because they are getting grain and free choice hay separately. The main goal is to keep them from experiencing acidosis and other digestive issues. K-State beef cattle nutritionist, Phillip Lancaster, recommends the 850-pound steer be offered 10 pounds of grain-protein mix per day to start with and then increase that amount to 20 pounds per day at half-pound increments every 2 days. After that, he advises increasing the amount of grain-protein mix offered by one-half per month for 2 months, then hold the amount of grain-protein mix offered steady until the steer reaches the optimum finish. With this feeding method, we're trying to get the steer to a diet that is 15% roughage and 85% grain and protein mix.