



The Hereford Story – From Pasture to Plate



BEEF – It's what's for dinner!



It starts here -

Prior to the breeding season, cow-calf producers use many sources of information to determine which bulls to mate to their cows, depending on the genetic goals they want to achieve – more pounds per calf, increased marbling, better milking mothers, etc. Tools often used are EPD's (expected progeny differences), genomic testing, artificial insemination, embryo transfer, and others.



Approximately 9 months after breeding, a cow delivers her calf. An average calf will weigh 70-80 lbs and within the next 30-40 minutes, has learned to stand and is trying to nurse. Within the next several hours, the calf gains strength and confidence under the protective care of its mother.





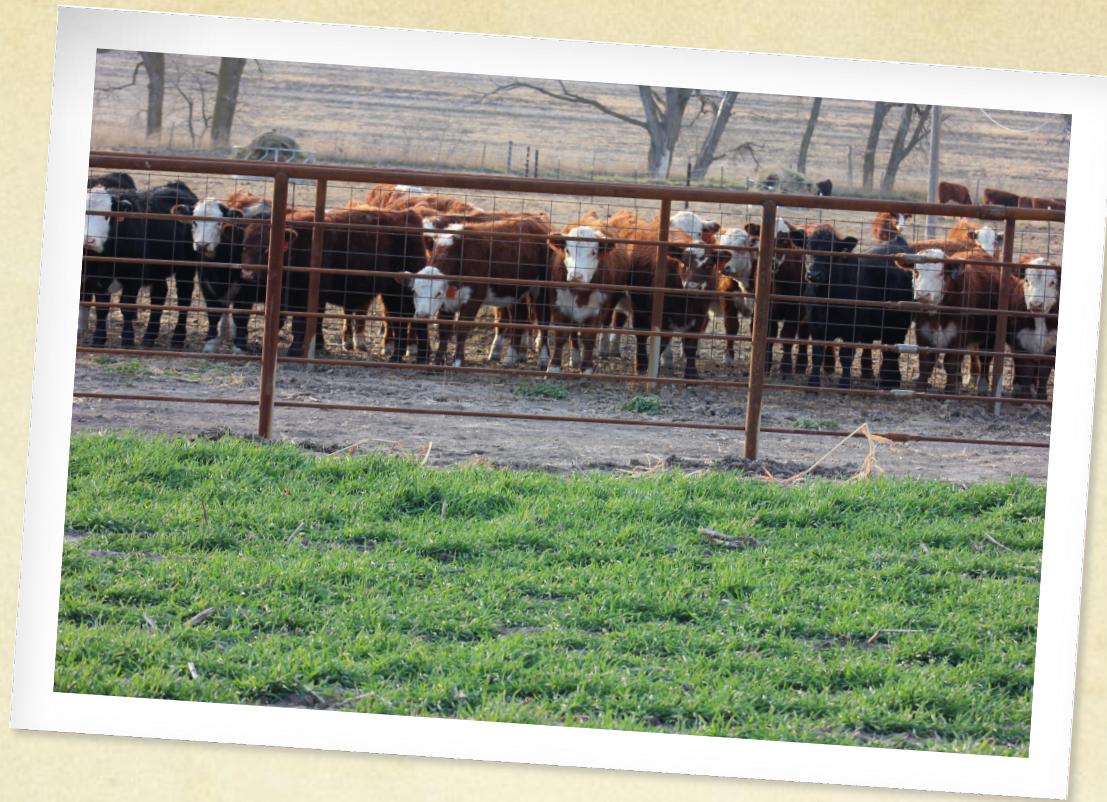
Once calving season is over, most producers will vaccinate cows and calves to protect against disease. Calves may also be tagged, branded, and castrated. Castration removes the ability of males to breed. This makes them easier to handle and feed out more efficiently.



Following spring work, cows and calves are moved to pasture for the summer and early fall. Selected bulls are also sent to pasture to start the breeding season for next year's calves. Calves stay with their mothers for about 7-8 months and grow to about 500-600 lbs.



Usually in October or November, the herd is taken off pasture and brought in for fall work. At that time, breeding bulls are removed from the herd, cows are checked for pregnancy, and calves are given their next round of vaccinations and are weaned, or taken from their mothers. No longer needing mother's milk, they soon learn to eat grain and hay.



Soon after weaning, calves are sorted into several groups depending on their future purpose.

If being kept for breeding, animals are fed a growing ration until they are of breeding age at approximately 1 year. At one year, females are bred to have their first calf as a two year old, while a 1 year old bull is able to sire calves.



Breeding animals are either kept for use in the herd or sold to other breeders for use in their herd. Breeding animals are usually chosen because they are among the best animals raised by a producer and their genetics can improve the herd or the breed in general.

Breeding animals can be sold in a variety of ways. Seedstock (purebred) breeders may sell animals as bred or ready for breeding, usually between 1-2 years of age. This may be done through a production sale, a consignment sale, or by private treaty.



Some seedstock/purebred producers use the show ring to help market their animals to other breeders and promote beef to consumers. Winning animals are selected based on size, appearance, and the ability to pass on superior genetics to offspring.



Those animals not being kept for breeding are usually sold as feeder calves. Whether sold or kept, calves are usually “backgrounded” over the winter months. During this time, they are fed a growing ration until they are ready to enter a feedlot for finishing.

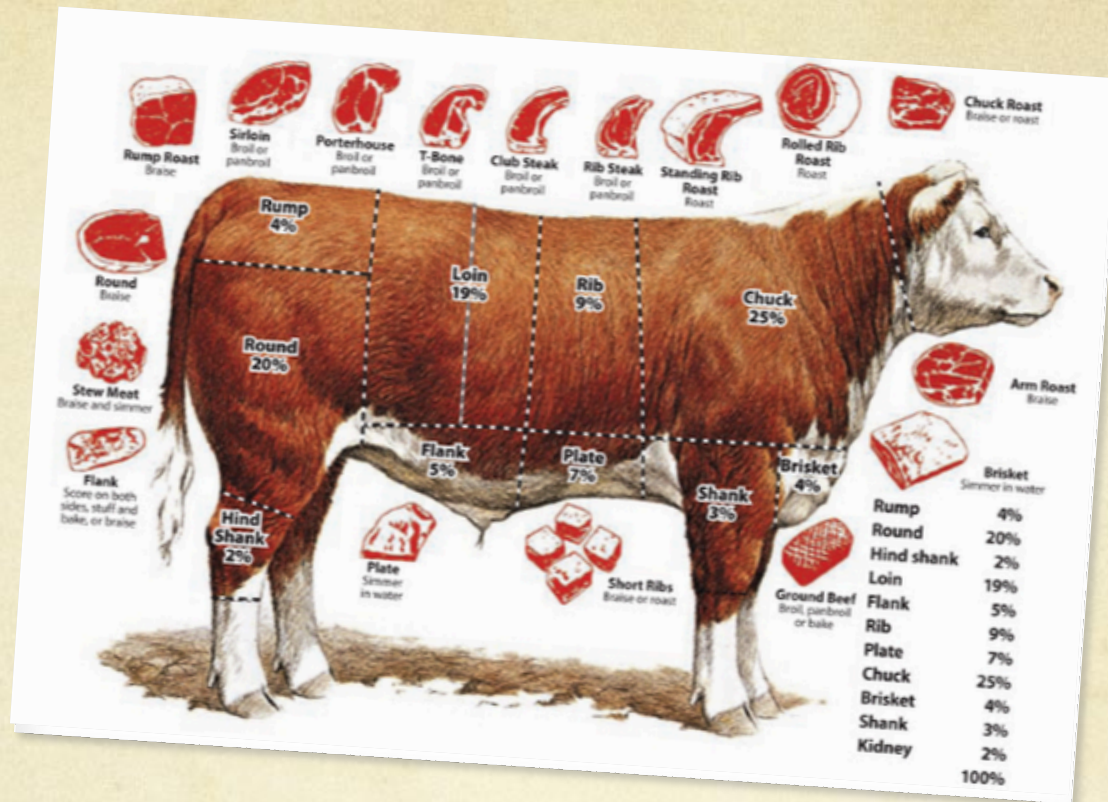




After reaching 900-1000 lbs, animals are sent to feed lots to “finish”. They are fed a diet high in protein (grain) to help them gain weight easily and reach market weight faster. These animals will spend about 4-5 months there, where they will gain another 300-400 lbs before being sold to a packer, who will harvest and process the beef.



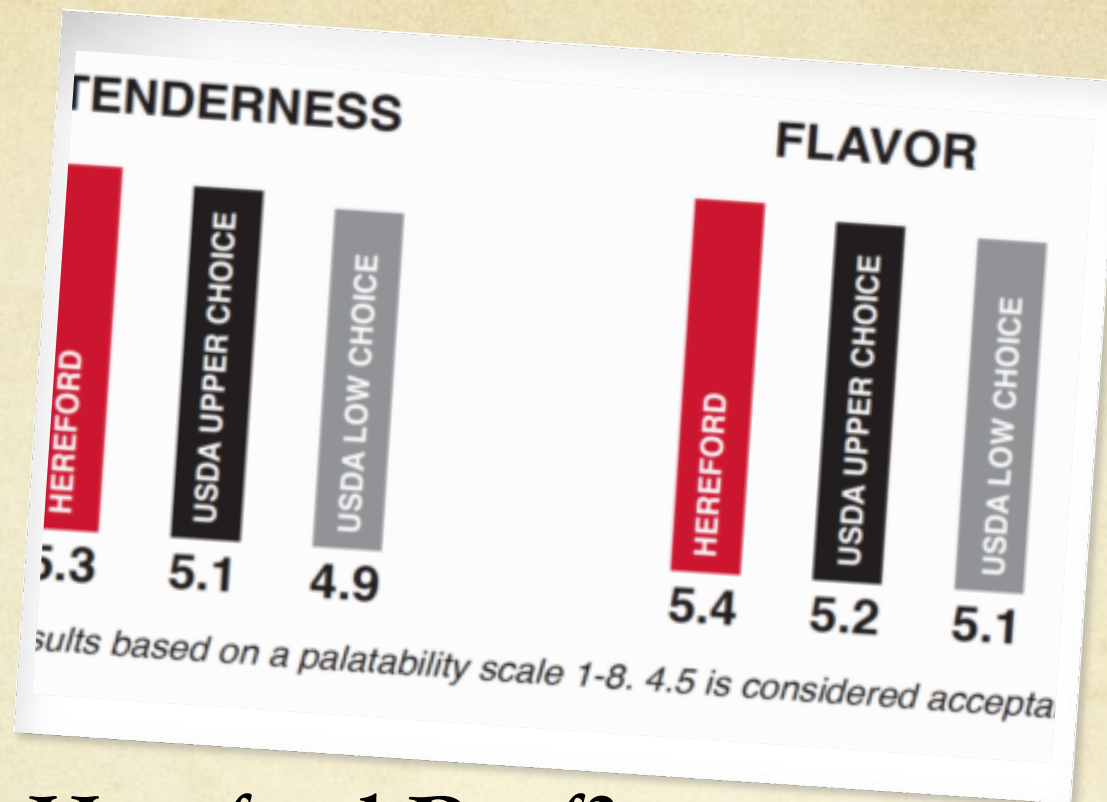
At the packing house, animals are humanely slaughtered and inspected, and allowed to age. After aging, the carcass is then cut into large wholesale pieces-called primal cuts- that are sent to retailers or the hotel/restaurant sector.



This illustration shows the major primal cuts taken from a beef animal. You can see that steaks come from the rib and loin. These are high value cuts because these muscles are not used in movement, therefore, they are more tender and flavorful than meat from other parts of the body, as well as being in limited supply. Muscles used in movement – legs and shoulder – are tougher and in greater supply. These cuts cost less, but with proper cooking can be just as juicy and flavorful as those from the rib and loin.



After grocery stores or restaurants receive the wholesale/primal cuts, they cut them into smaller pieces, called retail cuts, such as steaks, roasts, or hamburger, which are then packed, labeled, and priced for the consumer to purchase.



Why Hereford Beef?

In 1991, the American Hereford Association undertook history's most ambitious and comprehensive cattle breed study to determine Hereford's contribution to the beef supply. The Colorado State University studies were designed to quantify Hereford beef's merits in the minds and mouths of the ultimate quality judge – the consumer. The results showed Hereford beef was superior in every category, including flavor and tenderness.



And there you have it – the story of that juicy Hereford Beef steak on your plate.

If you have questions or need more information, go to the home page and contact Sheri Wieden, NHA Executive Secretary