

The Economics of Breeding Belties

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This past October I received quite a shock when our 13 Beltie feeder calves sold for an average of only 57 cents a pound. In previous years we had received substantially more, and on occasion our calves topped the market. As Beltie meat properly finished has been rated top in Canada for tenderness and taste, it seems to me that many of us are confronted with a serious market problem.

In 1953 when Aldermere Farm acquired its foundation stock of six Beltie females and a yearling Beltie bull, the owner, Harry A. Prock, had already solved the problem of obtaining a good price for Beltie steers and badly marked heifers. He had worked out an arrangement with a Philadelphia club and one or two restaurants noted for their fine food, to supply them with carcasses of well finished Belties directly from his farm at a price of U.S. \$1.00 a pound live weight when the animals left for slaughter. As his herd was large enough to supply the demand, this was obviously a highly satisfactory arrangement for both the customers and the farm.

Owners of small herds, under a dozen or so, usually are able to handle their annual crop of steered bull calves and heifers unsuitable for breeding by putting one carcass, cut up and wrapped, in their freezer and selling the remainder to friends or neighbours.

As herds increase, so does the problem of selling those animals unsuited for breeding. The availability of frozen semen from quality bulls has resulted in severely limiting the market for breeding bulls. Long term averages for male vs female births are about 51% to 49%, although in any one year these figures may differ widely. In any event, it is obvious that the importance of good marketing increases with the size of the individual herds.

We are fortunate that the demand for quality breeding stock in the U.S.A. has increased rapidly since the "Country" magazine article on the Aldermere herd appeared in the spring of 1989. "Country" magazine is a monthly without advertisements, published in the United States, with short articles and many excellent colour pictures, which is usually retained for future reference. This 1989 article on the development of the Aldermere herd produced an overwhelming response from all parts of the U.S. including Alaska, and led to the formation of many new Beltie herds. The first public national sale of Belties following publication of the "Country" article was held by the Maine Beef Producers Association in 1991 at the Frydberg, Maine,

Fairgrounds. Twenty-two lots of this first annual National Belted Galloway Sale sold for a total of \$66,100, an average of \$3,005 per lot. Thirty-two lots of other breeds sold for a total of \$30,755, an average of \$961 per lot. In the three yearly sales held in 1992 through 1994, average prices per lot for Belties have fluctuated between \$2,300 and \$3,100 per lot.

The latest sale was a private herd dispersal at East Aurora, New York, near Buffalo, on last November 6. This sale attracted many buyers from the eastern United States, and new record prices were established, \$9,000 for a five year old bull and \$11,000 for a mature cow with a heifer calf at side, sired by the record price bull. This sale totalled \$127,000 and the 32 lots averaged \$3,965 per lot. I cite these examples to emphasise that there is a strong demand in the U.S. for first-class breeding stock.

Now back to the problem of selling Beltie steered calves and yearlings for beef. From information provided by various sources, I gather than German breeders obtain substantially higher prices for both solid color Galloway and Beltie steers than we obtain in the United States. I had hoped to acquire significant figures from Germany but so far have not been successful.

This matter of marketing Beltie steered calves is so important for the future of our breed, I feel that it must be solved if our breed is to continue expanding. Beltie meat is top quality and therefore should be marketed as such. It appears to me that, initially at least, geographical groups of breeders will have to organise to meet this and other problems. It is encouraging that in the past few years regional groups have been formed in the Mid-West and Southern United States. In the Northeast we formed an association which was very active for a number of years, but not currently.

Over 40 years have passed since my late wife Marion and I first saw the Belties at Harry Prock's farm outside Philadelphia. It was love at first sight, and ever since then I have enjoyed looking at Belties wherever we found them in this country or abroad in the U.K. and Canada. We have been fortunate in knowing many of the pioneer breeders in Scotland and England, all very fine people. Here at Aldermere Farm we have enjoyed the many dedicated people whose interest in Belties has brought us together, including a number of breeders from Australia and New Zealand as well as Canada and the U.K. Knowing so many fine, enthusiastic breeders, I have full confidence in the future of our unique breed and the gradual overcoming of problems confronting us. Thank you all very much for your sincere and deep interest in our wonderful cattle.

*Paper submitted to 'Belties Down Under'
International Belted Galloway Conference
February, 1995*