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PAD WINTERING OF BEEF STEERS

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In late autumn many finishing farms sell remaining and almost finished cattle (320 to 360 kg) and carry no stock over the winter. Consequently these farms have to buy in stock during the spring, creating further competition at a time when prices are already high. While unfinished cattle could be carried through the winter on pasture with supplements of conserved forage and in some cases, crop residues, there is the danger of pasture damage. This paper outlines a system of off-paddock wintering on a pad.

Over the past few years about 54 two-year-old steers have been confined to the bed of a disused limestone quarry (1.2 ha) having a total area of 3.2 ha. The maximum holding capacity of the quarry bed is estimated as about 100 head of stock. The area is well drained, faces north and is sheltered by cliffs 25 m high. Water from a well is pumped to troughs, while a solidly built feeder allows 60 cm of space per beast and holds about 25 bales. Stocks of barley straw, meadow and threshed hay are built up sufficient for 50 cattle for 200 days. The feeder is filled every second day with 1 bale per 5 cattle, consisting half and half of meadow hay and either threshed hay or barley straw, Rock salt is the only supplement. Cattle remain on the pad for between 84 and 110 days.

Over the period 1970 to 1972, costs for feed and labour for a 100-day period have varied from \$8 to \$10 per beast. Home-produced hay is valued at market rates. For the same three-year period the difference between May and October prices have averaged \$13 for yearling cattle and \$11 for 2-year-olds. However, these prices underestimate the actual price difference as the vendor in May would have his price reduced by transport and commission, while in October the purchaser would have to add transport costs.

The system of pad wintering outlined has proved profitable and resulted in many other benefits. Cattle become very docile, wastage of feed and disease are minimal, and there is no pasture damage over the winter. While the ration is aimed at maintaining live-weight, cattle gain about 9 kg over 100 days.

Other possible advantages of the system of pad wintering are:

- (1) Improved management flexibility for the breeder and finisher.
- (2) Economic utilization of cheap crop residues.
- (3) High net return per beast by keeping it on the same property from conception to cooling chamber.