



Feeding Opportunities For Holstein Steers

Not long ago, in some parts of the country newborn Holstein bull calves could be purchased for \$5 to \$10 each. Today in the Midwest these calves now bring over \$200 and in some instances over \$300. Why the dramatic swing in prices? Several reasons. Holstein steers have very predictable gains and efficiencies as a result of the small gene pool. If fed and managed properly, they will produce a high-quality and consistent carcass with excellent cutability. These calves are typically bought at light weights and occupy feedlot space for an extended period of time, thus helping to keep feedlots full when replacement numbers are short and cattle prices high. These cattle tend to tolerate heat better but do not fare as well in the cold climates as their beef counterparts due to the difference in hide thickness, reduced backfat, shorter hair coat length, and density. Holsteins also tend to drink more water, resulting in possible wetter feedlot pens. Studies at Cornell University comparing Holstein and British beef breed steers found weight, daily gain, days on feed, and total weight gain to be similar; however, dry matter intake was higher and gain per unit of feed was lower for the Holstein steers.

Holstein steers are actually a byproduct of the dairy industry. However, they make up approximately 10 percent of the beef produced and marketed. When comparing carcass characteristics, Holsteins tend to have a smaller ribeye area, less backfat, lower yield grades and dressing percentages, and tend to be similar or higher in marbling scores and carcasses grading prime and choice. Ribeye area can be influenced by using implants and Optaflexx during the end of the feeding phase. Since these cattle tend to enter the feedlot shortly after weaning (300-400 lbs), the backgrounding stage is eliminated and cattle typically finish at weights ranging from 1,200 to 1,400 lbs by 14 to 18 months of age, resulting in

carcasses that produce cuts similar in size to industry standards.

Feeding strategies of Holsteins differ from beef breeds. Typically, newborn calves are fed starter feeds that have energy values capable of producing 2.5 to 3 lbs of gain per day. Trials conducted at Vigortone have resulted in feed to gain ratios of 2.7:1 on calves 8 to 16 weeks of age when fed a high quality starter containing 18% crude protein and an energy level of 0.58 Mcals/lb and straw. By the time calves reach 350 lbs, they should be bunk broke and receiving a diet with an energy level near 0.64 Mcals/lb. Calves that are not started on “finishing” diets early will have the potential to produce carcasses that exceed industry standards.

Holstein steers are quite tolerant of high corn diets. Some feeding programs are based upon feeding dry shell corn and a pelleted supplement. This type of feeding system usually works well as long as cattle never run out of feed. Metabolic disorders can become a problem with these type of systems if not managed properly. Feeding a diet with 7 to 10% forage may help eliminate intake swings that can occur in all corn diets.

With the availability of corn byproducts, diets can be economically formulated to optimize growth and meet fiber requirements. Rations containing high amounts of gluten feeds need to be supplemented with calcium to correct imbalances in calcium-to-phosphorus ratio. Added potassium may increase dry matter intake, and thiamine should be added to prevent polioencephalomalacia caused by high sulfur content of gluten feeds.

Vigortone has a full line of products and the technical support needed to help you take full advantage of opportunities that may exist in the dairy beef sector in your area.

Due to space limitations, references have not been included.