Beef Project Information

Beef Cattle can be lots of fun to raise and make a great project for all ages. If you are just starting, this handout will give you some resource ideas and basic information to keep in mind.

Getting Started
You will need to decide if you are raising beef as a breeding project, a market project, or both. Breeding animals are raised in order to breed and produce young for you. Market animals are raised with the intention of selling and/or butchering them for food. It is a good idea to learn all you can about any animal project before you actually acquire that animal. This way you will be well prepared for the care you will need to give and expenses you may incur. The Maryland Cattleman's Association website (www.marylandcattle.org) has general information and lists all current contacts for the breed associations in our state. National Breed Associations have lots of information about the breed and links to tips on care. The Beef Resource Handbook, published by The Ohio State University Extension, is available through the extension office and is a wonderful resource for 4-H breeding heifer and market steer projects. Several workbooks are also available for purchase that will help you learn as you research your project. There are also many beef breeders in our area that can help you if you have questions. There are usually several workshop opportunities throughout the year where you can learn more about your project.

Make sure you have a safe place to house your cattle with adequate space, ventilation, available water and shelter. Feed requirements will vary based on the type of animals you choose. Talk to a veterinarian that you intend to use to see what vaccinations and other health considerations you should be ready for. They can help you gather items for basic first aid and health maintenance. A client/patient relationship with your vet is very important. Remember that beef cattle are large and strong. You will need to plan on spending a lot of time working with them and leading them so you will be able to handle them in the show ring. Start while they are small so both you and your animal will have a better experience!

Look to your county 4-H newsletter for deadlines on ownership requirements and identification for your animals. Dates are important to follow if you plan to exhibit your beef heifers or steers at county or state fair. If you have questions, you can always call the University of Maryland Extension offices and speak with your 4-H educator.

Breeding Heifers
The breed of heifer you choose will depend on what you plan to do with the animals and personal preference. Research and think about your marketing options or what you want to use the animals for before selecting a breed. Breed Associations can help you locate breeders who have available stock. Learn about the conformation and type necessary to be a good representative of your selected breed. Again, if you plan to exhibit the animal, you will need to

look at what requirements are for registration and identification to be eligible. Registered breeding animals need to be transferred to the 4-H'ers name and commercial animals need to be ear tagged with a Maryland 4-H tag.

Market & Feeder Steers
If you are raising a market animal as a 4-H project, you will need to be sure to pay attention to the weigh-in and tagging date. You will bring your steer in at this time to be weighed and ear-tagged for identification as your project animal. Calculating rate of gain is important and is one of the qualifying factors for being able to show at the state fair.

You may choose to raise your steer for your own family to eat later, have a private buyer for it, or try to get it in the county fair or state fair sale. Look for sale requirements in the fair information to be sure you know all the rules. If you do meet sale requirements, you will need to talk to people you know or do business with and encourage them to come bid on your steer. Remember, it takes at least two bidders to get the price up! Only market steers are allowed to be sold in the livestock auction as feeders can be raised for an additional year sold the following year. The Cecil County Fair requires 4-H livestock sale participants (and a parent) to attend a mandatory sale meeting the first year you plan to sell and every other year thereafter.

Record Keeping
Part of the 4-H experience is keeping records of what you have done. In the future, you will have to do this a lot, so it's good practice now! There are record sheets for you to fill out with all the information you have kept over the year. You may want to print one out (they are available on our county 4-H website or in the University of Maryland Extension Office) and update it throughout the year. Keeping a calendar that lists all your activities and expenses is a big help in working through your record sheets later.

Other activities
4-H provides lots of opportunities for "learning by doing" in the livestock project area and other county events. You may want to look at participating in livestock skill-a-thon, livestock judging or communications day. What you get out of your 4-H experience is equal to what you put into it.

Like all 4-H projects, the goal of the program is for you to learn and have fun doing it! We all know we can learn more every year, regardless of how long we have been working with a particular project. The most important skills you will develop are those life skills like decision making, responsibility, teamwork, setting goals and sportsmanship. These things will stay with you no matter where your life's path may lead.