

Contributors, Introduction and Section 1

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The notebook is designed for you to add materials and notes. The materials come from a variety of sources. This is the starting point for you as you explore the opportunities of grass based beef production and the direct marketing option of farmers markets.

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Introduction

This handbook has been created as a resource starting point for individuals wanting to have more information about grass-fed beef. It is the compilation from a series of the workshops that were held with a group of Ohio dairy and beef farmers. The opportunity to do the workshops and this handbook came from a grant provided by the Agricultural Marketing Service's Farmers Market Promotion Program. The suggested resources are designed to lead you to other information sites as you seek to learn about creating, processing, and marketing grass-fed beef. You may choose to use specific sections as questions arise or you may use the handbook as a guide to developing a grass-fed beef farm.

History:

The genesis of this grass-fed beef project started at two points. The first point was the lack of value for dairy bull calves that the Director of Small Farm Institute would hear from dairy graziers' discussions at meetings and conferences. Small Farm Institute was founded in 2001 as a nonprofit organization to work with existing small farms, beginning farmers, and landowners interested in developing profitable enterprises and adding value to Ohio's small farms. The second point was from Parker Bosley, a retired chef, who was working with the North Union Farmers Market. He was identifying and encouraging small-scale farmers to participate in the direct marketing opportunity that the North Union Farmers Markets offered. He was encouraging the farmers to produce grass-fed livestock. He wondered if the dairy graziers that Small Farm Institute provided grazing information to would be logical sources for producing beef for grass-fed product. In addition, Mr. Bosley contacted The Ohio State University about the need to develop

French butchering techniques for adding value to beef carcasses, and retail cuts, as well as looking for help building the capacity for more grass-fed production.

Members of The Ohio State University's Department of Animal Science faculty met with Small Farm Institute Director and North Union Farmers Market's Parker Bosley to explore ways to develop alternative production and marketing strategies for beef. The result was a project called Ohio Initiative for Grass Fed Beef. The group decided to pursue three projects. One was developing direct markets for grass-fed beef. The second project was to learn about adding value to carcasses with new meat cutting techniques, and the third was determining the current infrastructure capacity of inspected butchering and processing facilities in Ohio.

Structure:

This project is designed to introduce farmers to grass-fed beef market opportunities, as well as to investigate the constraints. One of the strong demands for grass-fed beef has come from the farmers' markets. Creating and marketing desirable grass-fed beef product is both an art and a science. We have included those key building blocks in this notebook. Section one is designed to identify the opportunities and barriers to raising grass-fed beef, and direct marketing the products. By setting realistic goals and benchmarks for your farm, you will be able to improve and see the areas of your strengths and weaknesses. Section two is in introduction to grazing livestock for meat production. There are a number of elements to consider, and understanding the management practices of grazing, what resources are needed, and the timing of calving and age of animals to market are keys to your profitability. Section three is included to help you gain a greater understanding of your animals, their nutritional needs, and how the meat is produced. Section four is the processing, marketing and introduction to Beef University (A Foodservice Guide to Beef). Section five is the National Grocer's Association Consumer Survey which introduces producers to consumer expectations, branding and sensory desires. Section six contains additional resources with in-depth information useful to beef producers, marketers, and consumers.

Section 1

“Success is a journey, not a destination” (Arthur Ashe, Jr.) is the mindset that you need to develop for your grass-fed beef farm. This involves planning and goal setting. Each year, you should evaluate how the previous year went. You should review any notes and records you have on your livestock, fields, markets and other experiences to prepare for the next year's activities. By having timeline for what you need to accomplish each month, you can know where you are heading. Raising grass-fed beef is larger than just hoping that you have enough forages for your beef. You should set goals for production and marketing.

Whether you are a new grass-fed beef farmer interested in direct marketing or a veteran farmer, you should lay out the questions that you have for your farming operation. This time is for identifying barriers and opportunities you have. Each farm will have different questions and needs to explore. As you list them, you can decide the importance of each one. This provides the key components for preparing a plan of action with time frames. This action will help to keep you focused on the important issues that you need to address in the right priority. Because you have chosen to produce and market, your available time is shorter. Think about using the Pareto's Principle, the 80/20 Rule, to focus 80 percent of your time and energy on the 20 percent of your work with the greatest return for the project. The business of value added is different than being a producer. You need to prepare to learn as much as you can about being in the “food business”. If you have no experience with direct marketing, you might start with going to several farmers’ markets. (To locate markets: <http://oh.marketmaker.uiuc.edu>.) In addition, you should identify someone who is willing to mentor you in the first year or two. This will help you avoid the “if I had only asked someone” comments. There are more resource references in the Section 5 (Consumer Interest, Direct Marketing, Expectations) and Section 6 (Additional Resources).

Other resources for planning and goal setting can be found in **Building A Sustainable Business**: *A Guide To Developing A Business Plan for Farms and Rural Business* by SAN Handbook Series Book 6: Minnesota Institute for Sustainable Agriculture or <http://Ohioagmanager.osu.edu/resources>.