

SUPPLIES OF FEEDER CATTLE AND CHOICE OF ANIMALS TO BE FATTENED

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SUMMARY

Over 11 000 head of cattle the breakdown of breeds is the following :

Pastoral zebu cattle	39 p. 100
Improved zebu cattle from ranches	27 p. 100
Improved zebu × large framed exotic breeds	26 p. 100
Improved zebu × small framed exotic breeds	8 p. 100

The supply of immature cattle has exceeded the requirements. A tremendous variability in respect of quality is observed. It is more important to obtain groups of similar animals. A period of pasture fattening is very suitable. The differential price offered by feeders tend to equalize the net margins per animal.

RESUME

Approvisionnement en bétail et choix des animaux pour l'embouche

Les 11 000 animaux engraisés se répartissaient :

Zébus d'élevage extensif	39 p. 100
Zébus améliorés en ranches	27 p. 100
Zébus améliorés × grandes races importées	26 p. 100
Zébus améliorés × petites races importées	8 p. 100

L'approvisionnement en bétail impubère a dépassé les besoins. Une très grande variabilité dans la qualité du bétail est observée. Il est important de répartir les animaux en groupes homogènes. Pour cela une période d'observation au pâturage est très utile. Les animaux les plus aptes sont aussi les plus chers à l'achat, ce qui égalise finalement les marges brutes.

A major objective of the Project was to assess the commercial viability of intensive cattle fattening enterprises in Kenya. This involved an assessment of the available supply of immature cattle for fattening, while another, related, requirement was to estimate the response of the immature cattle to feeding.

An obvious danger that had to be avoided was that the Project might test the skill and ability of its cattle buyer rather than the response of average cattle. To avoid this, care was taken to buy large unselected groups of cattle, excluding only animals which were visibly sick.

In the event the Project purchased over 11,000 head of cattle with a breakdown in the following breeds :

Pastoral Zebu cattle	39 p. 100
Improved Zebu cattle from ranches..	27 p. 100
Improved Zebu x Large framed exotic breeds	26 p. 100
Improved Zebu x Small framed exotic breeds	8 p. 100

Within each breed animals were assigned to feeding trials on the basis of their live weight, their number of mature teeth (taken as an indication of age) and their gain made upon pasture between arrival at the Station and going on feed (if applicable). These characteristics were used because they were simple

to observe and to define to the cattle feeder. By forming experimental groups of cattle which were uniform in the above criteria the question of choice of cattle was obviated. Undoubtedly the animal performance figures thus obtained were poorer than would have been obtained by an expert cattle feeder who was able to make astute and selective purchases. Nevertheless, the figures obtained have served as a useful guide for the average expectation of cattle feeding results in a commercial feedlot.

OBSERVATIONS

Based on the experience gained in the Project, the following opinions have been formed among the Project staff :

1. Despite early pessimism the supply of immature cattle has exceeded the requirement of the Project throughout its life. It seemed that the offer to purchase immature cattle at attractive prices on a year round basis is an innovation in its own right. Cattle owners are thus faced with a new opportunity which did not exist before and their response to this opportunity can only be gauged by offering to buy cattle, not from a static analysis of the previous state of affairs ;

2. Available feeder cattle show a tremendous variability in respect of quality. This variation would appear to be inevitable at the initial introduction of intensive feeding into a traditional industry and is occasioned by the great variation in environmental conditions encountered by the feeder cattle. They originate from many owners using different standards of management and enduring many and different types of husbandry under varied climatic conditions. There are grounds for assuming that the uniformity would increase as trade flows become established and immature cattle pass directly from breeder to feeder on a regular basis ;

3. From the point of view of feedlot management, it is more important to obtain groups of similar animals than to identify the best ones. For this reason it appears advantageous to interpose a period of pasture fattening between the time of purchase from the breeder or trader and entry into the feedlot.

During this time uniform groups of cattle can be assembled from many purchases. Equally, if a large number of cattle are bought, they can be split into the most uniform groups possible while being observed on pasture ;

4. The choice between the cattle of the four main breed types available is one for the individual feeder, in relation to his individual circumstances, particularly with regard to feed supplies, his market eligibility and the relative supply prices for immatures of different types. The differential prices offered by feeders tend to equalize the net margins per animal day obtained from feeding animals of different types, in relation to their expected performance and their finished grade potential. All breed types can be equally attractive to the feeder so long as they are available at appropriate prices, with any likely feeding risks appropriately discounted in their supply price.