

Life Cycle



Cow-Calf Farm

Beef cattle are born on a cow-calf farm. Cows are pregnant for 280 days before giving birth. They usually have one calf a year, which weighs 40-45 kg at birth. Peak calving is often timed to occur in the spring when grass has begun to grow. Calves are weaned at approximately six months old.



Backgrounding Farm

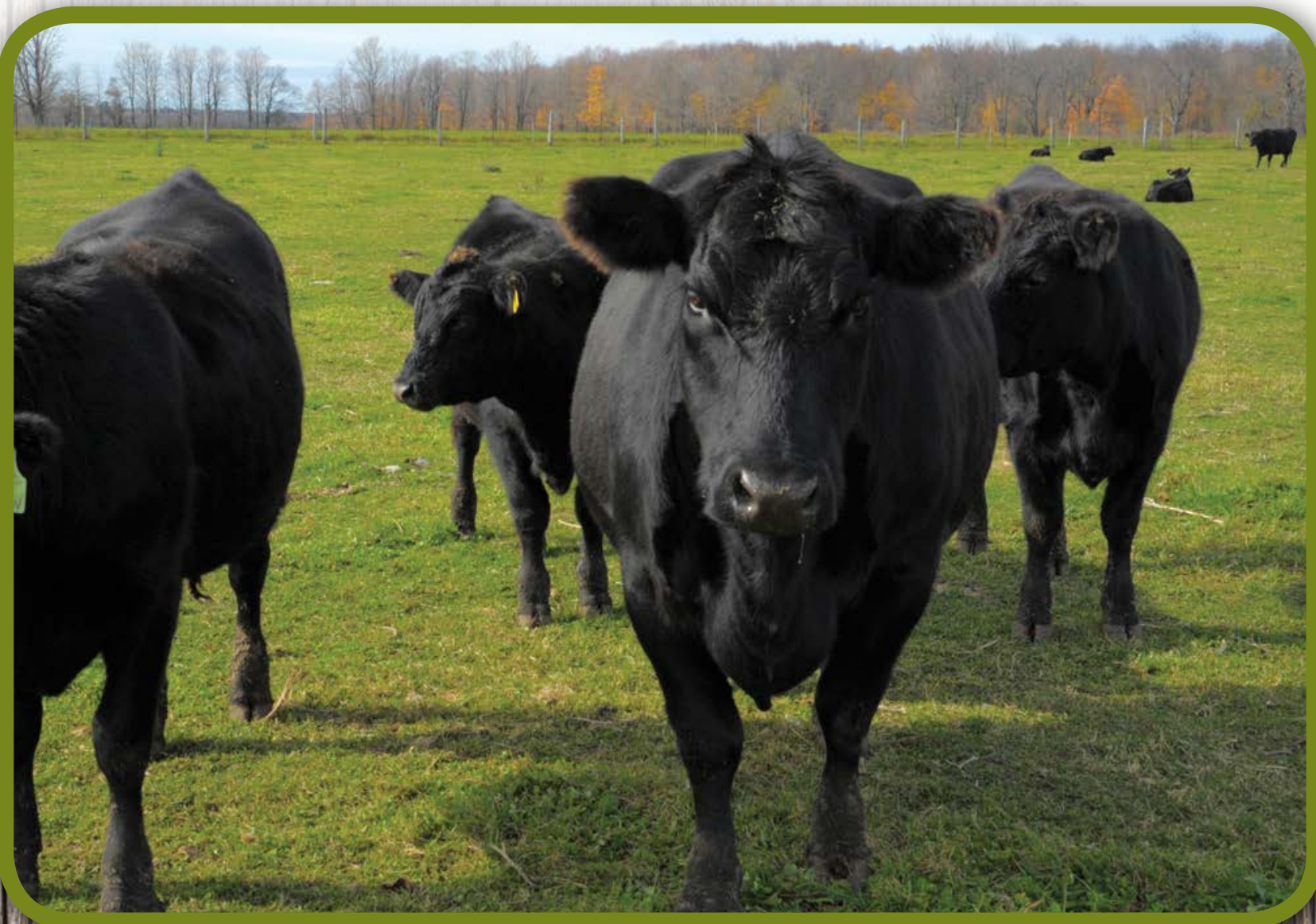
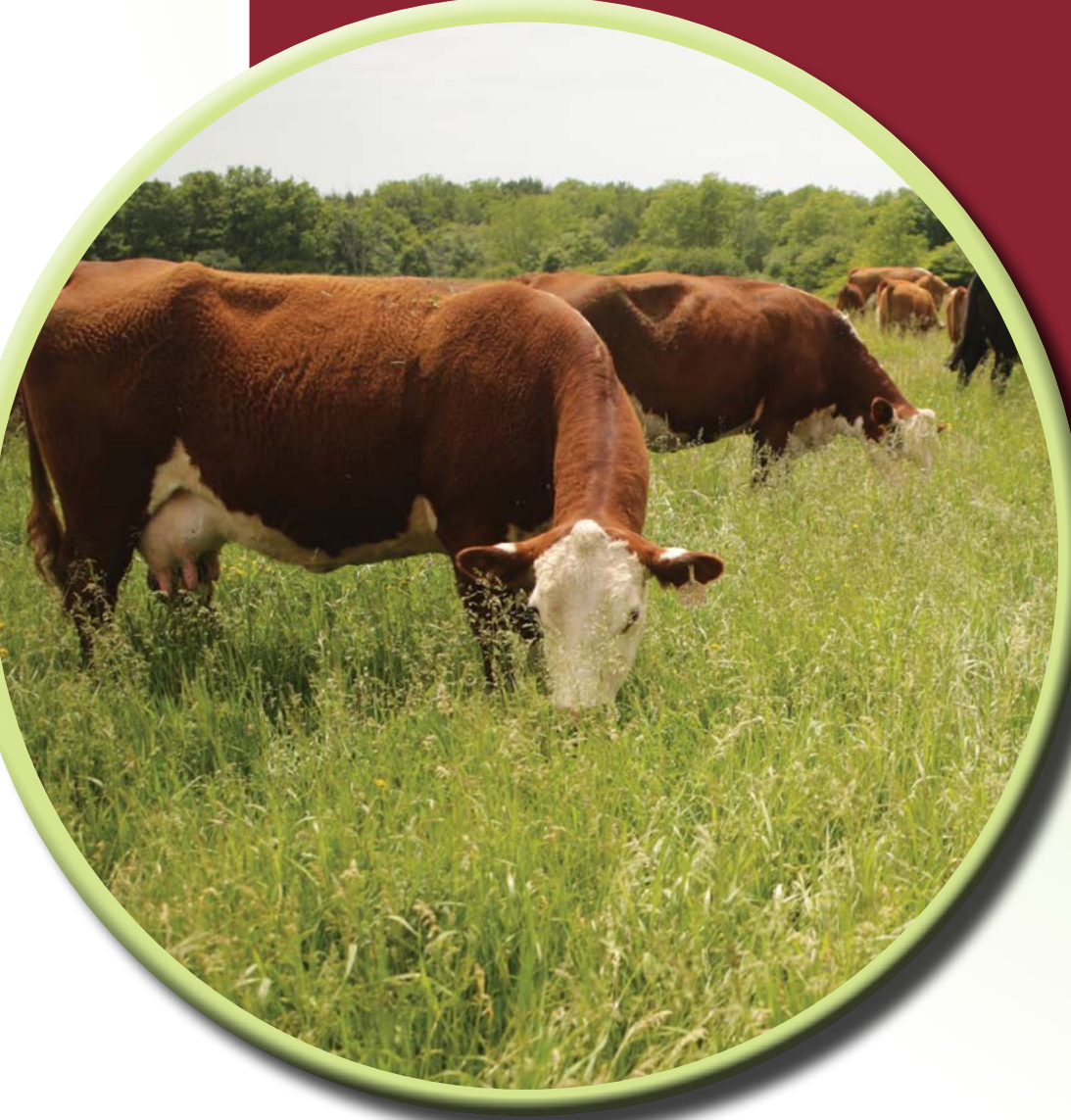
After weaning, the calves are moved to a backgrounding farm. There, they are raised on a hay-based diet until their weight increases to about 400 kg.

Mature Cow & Bull

Animals with the best genetics and most desirable traits stay on the cow-calf farm to add to the herd.

Feedlot

At nine to eleven months of age, cattle are typically moved to a feedlot where they are raised to a finished weight of about 635 kg.



What about hormones?



Health Canada has approved synthetic versions of natural hormones for safe use in beef cattle and some farmers use them. These hormones help cattle convert the food they eat into muscle more efficiently, meaning cattle are raised using fewer resources - less feed, water and less manure produced.



The Real DIRT on Beef Farming

Fact

✓ There's no such thing as hormone-free beef. Hormones occur naturally in all animals, people and plants.



Fact

✓ 97% of Canada's farms are still family owned and run.



Fact

✓ The health and welfare of their animals is the top priority for beef farmers.



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Where do they live?



Cows and calves typically live outside on pasture for most of the year. Beef cattle have thick coats that, along with adequate water, food and shelter, allow them to live outdoors year-round. They're hardy animals that adapt well to our climate. Cattle live in feedlots in the months before going to market. Feedlots provide ample space, shelter and access to fresh feed and water.



What do they eat?



For most of their lives, beef cattle eat pasture grasses and other plants in the summer, and hay in the winter months. These grasses and plants are called forages. Salt and other minerals are made available too, as they support optimum cattle health and growth.

Once at a feedlot, cattle are transitioned to a diet of high-energy grains that has been created in consultation with an animal nutritionist.



did you know...

In Canada, 30% of farmland is unsuitable for growing crops but is ideal for grazing livestock. Cattle also provide a market for damaged grains, which are unsuitable for human consumption at the time of harvest.



Terminology

Herd: A large group of cattle.

Calf: A newborn bovine.

Heifer: A young female bovine that hasn't yet had a calf.

Steer: A castrated male bovine.

Cow: A mature female bovine.

Bull: A mature male bovine.

Weaned: When calves stop drinking milk and begin eating a balanced diet of forages and grains.

Cow-calf farm: Farms where beef cows and calves are raised on pasture in the spring, summer and fall.

Backgrounding: The growing, feeding and managing of steers and heifers from weaning until they enter a feedlot.

Feedlot: Specially designed open pens or barns where cattle live until they are ready for market.

Ruminant: Any hooved animal that digests its food in two steps: first by eating the raw material and regurgitating a semi-digested form known as cud, then eating the cud, a process called ruminating. Ruminants have four compartments in their stomachs.