

Improving Dairy Profitability

Incorporating Managed Grazing



The Facts

Raising dairy heifers on the farm is the second highest expense on most operations. In fact, 57% of those costs are for feed from birth to freshening. The average cost to raise a heifer in 2013 was \$2,274.00. Feed costs equated to \$1,274.00 of the total expenses.

Heifer Replacement Comparison Cost

Custom Confinement– Year-round:

\$2.00–\$2.50 per head/day
 (\$730.00–\$913.00 per head/year)

On-site confinement– Year-round:

\$1.50–\$2.00 per head/day
 (\$548.00–\$730.00 per head/year)

Managed Grazing + On-site Confinement:

Grazing:

(180 days) \$0.43 per head/day
 (\$77.00 per head/180 days)

On-site confinement:

(185 days) \$1.50–\$2.00 per head/day
 (\$278–\$370 per head/185 days)

Combined Costs:

\$355.00 per head/year
 (\$1.50 on-site confinement)

\$447.00 per head/year
 (\$2.00 on-site confinement)

Cost Savings for 100 Head per Year

Converting from year-round custom confinement to grazing plus on-site confinement resulted in a savings of \$37,500 or a 51% cost reduction.

Converting from year-round on-site confinement to grazing plus on-site confinement resulted in a savings of \$19,300 or a 35% cost reduction.

Heifers Raised on Pasture Versus Confinement

A University of Wisconsin research study looked at average daily gain and first lactation performance between heifers raised on pasture and confinement raised heifers.

Average Daily Gain

Confined Heifers: 1.86 lbs/head/day
 Pastured Heifers: 1.97 lbs/head/day
 Industry Development Goals: 1.7 lbs/head/day (Holsteins)

First Lactation Performance

Confined Heifers: 23,415 lbs/head
 Pastured Heifers: 25,328 lbs/head
 (1,900 lbs or 7.5% more)

Pasture Raised Heifer Benefits

- Potential revenue increase
 1,900 lbs x \$15 cwt = \$285.00/cow
- Produced at lower costs
- Exceed industry standards for ADG
- Increased milk production in first lactation
- 40% less calving difficulty
- Higher fertility rates
- Greater herd longevity and herd health

Summer Grazing Environmental Benefits

- 24% sediment reduction
- 22% less sediment bound P runoff
- 23% less soluble P runoff*
- 27% lower volatilization of NH3 (Ammonia)
- 14% lower net emission of GHG
- 25% smaller carbon footprint

Highlighting a Grazing Success

I am finding after five years of managed grazing, I can raise heifers on pasture for about \$0.40 per animal per day and reach all of the Industry standards for weight and height rates of gains. They are strong and in good condition when they come into my free-stall. This still saves me about \$40,000 per year over having them custom raised.”

~Hans Breitenmoser

For more information about managed grazing visit our website or contact your local NRCS Service Center at www.wi.nrcs.usda.gov.

