

**BEEF.**  
IT'S WHAT'S FOR DINNER.®



# THE BEEF LIFECYCLE

The beef lifecycle is one of the most complex of any food, taking anywhere from one and a half to three years to bring beef from pasture to plate.



## COW-CALF

Beef cows are bred and calves are born and raised every year on cow-calf farms and ranches, spending time grazing on grass pastures within sight of their mothers. Beef calves are weaned away from their mothers between 6-8 months of age.

## DAIRY

Dairy cows are bred every year and calves are born nearly every day on modern dairy farms. Cows eat a scientifically-balanced diet aimed at producing high-quality milk and other dairy products. Dairy heifer calves (females) are fed colostrum and typically stay on the dairy to produce milk, while bull calves (males) are fed colostrum and go to a calf ranch within the first couple days of life. Dairy cows go into the beef supply at the end of their lifecycle, but bull calves are raised and fed as a beef animal to also produce wholesome beef products, just like typical beef cattle.



## STOCKERS AND BACKGROUNDERS

Between 6-12 months of age, some beef cattle will spend time at stocker and backgrounder farms and ranches where they graze on a variety of pastures. Here they gain weight and convert forage and grass into lean protein.

## CALF RANCH

Bull calves that come from dairies spend the majority of their lives at a very specialized segment of the industry called a calf ranch, before moving to a feedyard. At the calf ranch, calves receive individualized care and are raised and fed as beef animals in group pens based on likeness, including size and age, to produce wholesome beef products, just like typical beef cattle.



## FEEDYARD

Conventionally-raised cattle spend 4-6 months at a feedyard receiving daily care, and being fed a scientifically-balanced diet that is high in protein to convert feed into lean protein.

## LIVESTOCK AUCTION MARKETS

Livestock auctions are a critical link in how cattle exchange hands throughout the beef and dairy production process. Once calves from cow-calf ranches are between about 6-12 months of age, they leave the farm or ranch and are sold and purchased at livestock auction markets. Dairy cows are also often sold at livestock auction markets at the end of their lifecycle.



## PACKING PLANT

Cattle are sent to a packing plant to be slaughtered in modern processing facilities where skilled workers break down beef carcasses into popular beef cuts, which are then distributed to the retail and foodservice industries. Retailers and foodservice operators sell beef in **SUPERMARKETS AND RESTAURANTS.**



### FACTS AT A GLANCE:

**50**

STATES ARE HOME TO COW-CALF FARMS AND RANCHES OPERATED

**91%**

OF FARMS AND RANCHES ACROSS THE U.S. ARE FAMILY OWNED AND

**40**

HEAD IS THE AVERAGE HERD SIZE

**4-6**

IS TYPICALLY THE NUMBER OF MONTHS CATTLE SPEND AT A FEEDYARD

**130**

COUNTRIES IMPORT U.S. BEEF DUE TO GLOBAL DEMAND



Visit [www.calbeef.org](http://www.calbeef.org) to learn more about California's cattle ranchers and beef producers.