



SHOW SOLUTIONS

The ins and outs of feeding show steers vs. heifers

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Chuck Lemenager owns and operates [Lemenager Cattle](#) in Hudson, Illinois, along with his brother, Luke, and their families. Chuck also works for [Earlybird Nutrition](#) as a sales representative and is a nationally recognized cattle judge. His family shows highly competitive cattle across the U.S. Chuck's wife, Tori, keeps him in line, while his twins, Grace and Curt, keep him busy!

It's the most wonderful time of the year, and it can also be the most important time if you want to build a competitive edge in feeding your calf. Too often, people look at the winter months as an "off-season" for cattle projects that will be shown the following summer; that's the wrong way to think about things. I recommend getting on a competitive feeding program now so that you can reap the benefits later.

People often ask the same question: "I've got two steers and a heifer; is it okay to feed them the same thing?" That is, typically, a million-dollar inquiry. There are definitely some correlations between the two, such as body type, genetics, weight and age. However, I will attempt to give you a little insight below on what to look for when selecting the appropriate feed for your calf.

Feeding steers

We generally assume that exotic-type steers — such as those with Maine, Chianina or, sometimes, Simmental influence — will require a somewhat hotter and more dense feed. These breeds are a little shallower in their rib and higher in their flank and will require a higher volume of a lower protein (e.g., 11.5–12.5%), as well as a higher fat content (e.g., 3.5–4.5%), with a fiber somewhere in the range of 8–16%. [Show-Rite® Throttled Up](#) is a great product to fit this need. It's better to go into the warmer summer months ahead of the game by fattening up cattle now, as gains tend to slow in the summer months. Feeding 2–3% of body weight per day is ideal; 2–2.5% should maintain consistent gains, but I recommend 3% if you're pushing one. To calculate this amount, follow this equation: current weight x percentage. For example, if your steer weighs 1,000 pounds and you just want to continue consistently gaining because you're on track for ADG, you'd calculate the following: $1,000 \times 0.025 = 25$ pounds of feed per day.

British breeds or chunky-moderate crossbreeds can be a little different to feed. These cattle generally have higher conversion rates, so they put on condition or cover quickly — sometimes seemingly overnight. These steers will need more of a filler combined with a higher protein to allow them to also grow vertically. So often, we think, "It's a steer; feed 'em hard." However, especially with a more moderate calf, doing this can have detrimental results. You can shut them down and cause a much quicker end point. So, with this kind of steer, shoot for 12.5–13.5% protein, 10–16% fiber and 3–4% fat. [Show-Rite's Accelerator](#) is a great option to fill this need. You could also include some [Rite Fiber](#) to drop your fat level and add some filler, or even bounce the protein up by adding a 4-ounce cup of [Nutribase 400 A Plus](#).

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Feeding heifers

This is a little bit like the steer game in that we need to identify just what type of heifer we have before making any feeding decisions. Heifers are a completely different beast when considering your long-term goals; we need these projects to stick around for the long haul, so longevity is the target. In my opinion, a heifer should never have a higher fat content than 3.5%. We've all (me included) bought those "greener ones," but in these scenarios, patience is your friend. A bunch of the show feeds I recommend have less than 200 pounds of corn per ton. I'm looking for a feed with 2.5% or less fat, 17–21% fiber and 11–14% protein (dropping the protein as we become happy with the frame). As such, I really like to use [Show-Rite's HF](#). The biggest reason why I'm such a stickler for a low-fat, high-fiber diet for heifers is because it's nearly impossible to fix the chest on one once it's blown. At our house, it's a lot easier to steady things by keeping hold of the reins rather than by trying to turn back the clock. Now, I'm not going to say I've never fed a steer ration to a heifer, but if I did, it was for a very short duration, or when I saw she didn't respond to the feed. There is an option if that happens weekly — it's called a sale barn.

As these heifers continue to grow and mature, they require less and less energy to sustain themselves. On many occasions, we have even mixed a high-fiber supplement into a high-fiber feed, such as [Show-Rite Rite Fiber](#) mixed with an HF-type feed. These females become so easy feeding, they seem to get fat on air. That's when, quite possibly, the most important part of feeding heifers comes into play: a round bale of grass hay. Believe me when I say that this is the single-most important thing you can do and feed. But can you justify a round bale with just a couple of calves? Yes, you can. If you've only got 1–3 calves on feed, you're not going to go through a lot of hay, so get a tarp or something to cover it. Hay is the cheapest available feed out there, and it works. What it does for them — not only in body confirmation but also for gut health — is irreplaceable.

A final word

As you can see, feeding heifers is considerably different from feeding steers in many aspects, with the steer being the sprint and the heifer being the marathon. For both the Earlybird Nutrition and Show-Rite team representatives, we do our best work when we actually get to see the animal in order to offer suggestions and feeding recommendations that will help you and your project. The more eyes you get on your calf, the better. This includes ag teachers, feed salesman or breeders — anybody that you trust to give you good advice.

Lastly, if you're mixing your own feed, I will tell you that [Show-Rite's Nutribase 400 A Plus](#) concentrated premix is a mainstay in our custom rations; it truly has all the bells and whistles one could ask for. Good luck out there!

For more tips on how to be successful in the show ring, please visit www.showrite.com or contact a Show-Rite representative.

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