



PROFILE

Steer cost stacks up for home kill



By FARMER LIZ

I AM often asked whether it is really worth raising a beef steer for home meat consumption, so when we had a steer butchered a few weeks ago, I decided to weigh all the cuts of meat and calculate the value of the product versus the approximate cost of raising the steer, so that I could work out if it was worth doing.

We live on eight acres (3.23 ha.) and keep a few steers and two house cows. We feed a little grain each day to keep the cattle tame, and the occasional round bale in winter when our pasture dies back. Apart from that our costs are minimal.

In future we will fatten the calves from our house cows for meat, but we bought this steer before we got the cows. If you have to buy a weaner steer, they are about \$200 to \$300, depending on size and breed. A poddy calf is cheaper, but you will pay most of the extra in milk powder, unless you have a source of milk.

We pay a butcher to slaughter and butcher the animal on our property. This means that the meat can't leave our property, but we like the fact that the steer doesn't have to travel anywhere, he dies happy eating some grain. We also

like the fact that we know for sure that we get the meat from our steer, which can be a problem if you send the animal away.

We vacuum pack most of the meat, so we pay a bit extra for the thicker bags. We also like a few extras such as natural sausage skins, so we buy these additional to the butcher costs – see table below.

Another cost which I haven't factored into this analysis is freezers. Our 500L and 250L freezers cost about \$300 to \$500 each (it all depends on the brand, and you can get them second-hand). We turn off the small one as soon as we empty it, so that helps with power consumption.

While this is a big up-front cost, I hope that they are going to last around 10 years each, which means the contribution to the annual cost is relatively small. Our power bill also increased by about \$100 a year due to running both freezers.

I weighed each cut of meat as I packed them and used a table of costs from a local butcher to calculate the value of all the meat.

I was surprised to find that it came to a total of nearly \$3000, with an average cost of \$4.80/kg across all the meat. This was without considering other products such as the hide and manure produced while the animal was alive.

These are things that you may not buy if you didn't have a steer killed, but when you have access to these as by-products, they do have value. We didn't keep the hide from this steer, but previously we have tanned a hide and produced a nice rug. If you were to buy the hide it is worth about \$25, but the rug would be worth \$200 to \$300, with very little additional cost apart from our labour.

One point to note is that you get the full range of cuts of meat, and for some people this will mean learning a few new recipes.

A friend commented to me a while ago that they don't eat sausages very often. When you have 40kg of sausages in the freezer, you have to find a way to eat them all! We give most of the offal to our dogs, but some people will value this as a tasty extra.

Obviously, some of the nicer cuts are a little scarce, such as the eye-fillet, but a good slow cooker will help you to create some delicious meals from all the tougher meat. It is a bit of a change of culture compared to buying meat as you need it, but you soon get used to having all those options right at home in your own freezer.

Given that the cost to raise the steer was about half the value of the products, it is clearly worth

doing from an economic perspective, even if I left out some costs.

As for the time involved, steers are very low maintenance. As long as they have enough pasture and water and good fences, they do not require daily attention.

The biggest demand on time is the butchering process, which is usually an afternoon with the butcher to slaughter the animal and then a morning a few days later to butcher the animal and pack all the meat.

You also need to organise to dispose of the waste, which usually means a few hours digging a hole in the back paddock. If you do have a small farm, raising a steer is a good way to produce cheap meat for your own consumption. I didn't have a chance to get into the detail of caring for a steer in this article, but it is important to research this and make sure you have the time and resources available.

● The author Farmer Liz lives on eight acres in south east Queensland, Australia, with her husband Peter and two dogs. They have a passion for small-scale organic farming and producing and eating real food. They keep chickens, beef steers, two jersey cows and a big vegetable garden. Liz writes a blog about their farm to both inspire and help others who are interested in self-sufficiency. Visit it at www.eight-acres.blogspot.com.au/ –Story courtesy: Farm Style Australia.

Cost

Cost of the animal	\$200-300
Cost to feed grain and hay over 2 years	\$500
Cost to butcher	\$500
Bags and extras like sausage skins	\$100
Total cost	\$1300-1400

Value

Product	Price/kg	kgValue	Product	Price	kgValue
BBQ steak/casserole	\$8.99	\$287.68	Y-Bone	\$7.99	\$87.89
Blade roast	\$8.99	\$98.89	Sausages	\$7.50	\$300.00
Eye fillet	\$31.99	\$127.96	Mince	\$9.99	\$459.54
Fresh silverside	\$8.99	\$179.80	Soup bones	\$5.95	\$459.54
Rolled roast	\$7.99	\$167.79	Kidney	\$5.00	\$10.00
Rib fillet	\$28.99	\$289.00	Heart	\$5.00	\$5.00
Rump	\$17.99	\$242.87	Liver	\$5.00	\$10.00
Sirloin	\$20.00	\$100.00	Dog bones\$	\$2.80	\$84.00
T-Bone	\$17.99	\$161.91	Tallow	\$2.00	\$12.00
Topside roast	\$8.99	\$188.79	Total value		\$2808.12