Expanding beef cattle profitability in Virginia’s Northern Piedmont

**Currently:**

- Most weaned and backgrounded calves leave the state for fattening in out-of-state feedlots.
- A small percentage of calves are kept as stockers before shipping to out-of-state feedlots.
- Most cow-calf operations take commodity price. Some buyers pay premiums.
- Beef returns as “boxed beef” for retail to metro-consumers. Value/revenue is lost out-of-state.

A small percentage (<10%) of the region’s farms and cattle are conception-to-carcass operations that direct market beef (mostly pasture raised or grass-fed) at a premium to consumers. They process beef (usually one or two at a time) at one of six custom facilities. These producers are seeking additional slaughter and processing capacity.

Pastures in the region are currently underutilized with gains at about 1 lb/day.

**A new option:**

Efficiencies in cattle and pasture management, grazing, and transit, processing, even paperwork could increase returns to producers and the region. Processing and sales volumes could greatly increase. Additional acreage would be employed in grazing cattle retained in the region. Total returns to the regional economy would increase.

- With intensive custom grazing management cattle could gain 2 lbs per day over a two year period on Virginia Piedmont Pastures (ADG>2 lbs).
- With organization the beef sector could organize and diversify to graze calves and stockers to finish (for grain and grass-fed markets) in small groups sized to trailers.

A facility scaled to process the trailer-sized groups/lots will be able to meet high demand for local beef, with one day each week reserved for custom slaughter for small farms that direct market.
ALTERNATIVE OPTION FOR LOCAL LIVESTOCK PRODUCTIVITY

Cow-Calf Farms

25 Backgrounded Calves

They could be pooled into optimal groups of 75 (at 600 lbs) and sold at a 5-10% premium.

They could remain at the same farm.

Full 44’ trailer load of 75 calves moved to a different farm.

Custom Grazing on Improved Pastures

25 - 75 Stockered Cattle

Grown from 600 to 1000 lbs

Custom Grazing to Finish on Improved Pastures

25 Grass Finished for grass-fed market ~1200 lbs

50 Finished on Pasture with supplemental feed ~1200 lbs

Some may take longer to finish (stragglers)

Increased Local Slaughter & Processing Capacity

Local Slaughter & Processing Facility

Operating 5 days/week to optimize capacity

4 days/week 25 cattle/day

1 day/week custom slaughter 10 - 20 animals/day

Increased local slaughter & processing capacity