

## **MARKETING LONGHORN BEEF IN FREEZER PACKS**

Selling Longhorn Beef in Freezer Packs containing a complete cross-section is probably the easiest way in which you can become involved in direct marketing the beef that you produce as it means that you are not left with surpluses of fore-end.

You will require the services of a suitable abattoir. A good butcher who is licensed to cut up for third parties will need to be found, although this may in some cases be a service offered by your abattoir. Apart from that do be prepared for some extra work as the extra returns from direct selling require extra effort!

It is, of course, very important that animals go for slaughter with a good finish on them. Since flavour is greatly influenced by diet it is essential that any supplementary feeding is carefully chosen and completely natural – a mixture of rolled oats, some rolled barley, linseed pellets for example with plenty of sugar beet shreds would be ideal.

Carcasses must be properly hung for tenderness and fullness of flavour, hanging time will vary as the speed at which moisture is lost depends on the level of fat cover, but a hanging time of around three weeks is commonplace for quality beef production.

Vacuum packing in “useable size” packets is essential as is correct labelling. Packaging is all important today as not only do we have to operate legally we also have to compete with what, in terms of presentation, is offered by the supermarkets. Our customers should be able to take delivery of their Freezer Pack and put it away in their freezer inside ten minutes without the need to wash their hands when they have finished! Having tasted the beef your new customer will undoubtedly come back for more, but not if it meant a lot of work and inconvenience on the day it was delivered.

Be prepared to take notice of feedback from customers and make changes when necessary, be flexible to customer needs by reducing or increasing the size of packs and joints offered or attempting to finish cattle with more or less fat cover according to market requirements. Remember that a ration with too high a level of energy too early in the animal’s life will tend to lay down excess fat, it is far better to achieve growth and muscle and then allow the fat to develop more naturally, especially in the case of heifers. Do not make the mistake of assuming that your customers will all like what you like, they might do, but you are producing beef to sell and it is what the customer wants that is important and this may not necessarily be what you like.

Be sure to visit your abattoir, inspect your carcasses and make comparisons with others hanging alongside, accepting constructive criticism where appropriate. Develop a good working relationship with your butcher so that he understands exactly what is required of him and what it is that you are trying to achieve.

Never under sell your product! Achievable prices will vary from region to region, however too cheap a price will create suspicion that there is something wrong with it. A top quality traditionally reared and fully traceable product offered at the market price will be seen as good value for money compared with inferior quality products that are on offer elsewhere. Customers will pay more for better quality

beef. Keep an eye on the weekly average deadweight prices published in the farming press and if your gross income from pack sales less killing, butchering, packing and distribution costs for a carcass is not somewhere in the region of a hundred percent greater than it would have been if sold deadweight then you need to increase your price as your customers are getting a very good deal!

Finally remember to do everything within the law. There are many rules and regulations relating to food businesses and food premises, which ones apply to you will depend on what you do, how you do it and how much you produce. The way your product is distributed and sold will determine which hygiene regulations apply to your business. If you are in any doubt which legislation applies to you we recommend that you contact the following organisations for advice; each of them will be only too pleased to provide you with specialist information relevant to your particular enterprise:

- Local Environmental Health Department
- Local Planning Department
- Local Trading Standards Department