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ECONOMICS DEPARTMENT

ECONOMIC REPORT No. 32

BREEDING CATTLE COSTS 1951/52

by

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March, 1953.

AGRICULTURAL ECONOMICS DEPARTMENT

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BREEDING CATTLE COSTS 1951/52

The cost of rearing calves is a topical consideration in this area since with the continual cry of "More cattle for the Highlands" it is essential that those who ask for more beef should appreciate how much it is likely to cost under the systems of keeping breeding cows practised in this area.

In the last two years, the fattening of store cattle has shown profits and the question may be asked as to whether the breeders and rearers of beef cattle are also benefiting (indirectly) by the increased prices for fat cattle.

HERDS COSTED

Thirty-eight farmers provided data for the year's costs and since the cows were kept under widely different circumstances, the herds have been divided into four groups -

- Group 1 - 12 Caithness herds wintered inside.
- Group 2 - 12 Herds receiving Hill Cattle Subsidy.
- Group 3 - 7 Herds not receiving Hill Cattle Subsidy.
- Group 4 - 7 Herds of hardy cattle outwintered.

For convenience, the groups are referred to thus -

- Group 1 - Caithness Herds
- Group 2 - Upland Herds
- Group 3 - Lowland Herds
- Group 4 - Hill Herds.

LOCATION AND SIZE OF FARM

The distribution of the herds by counties is shown in Table I.

TABLE I

DISTRIBUTION OF HERDS THROUGH THE COUNTIES

	<u>Caithness</u>	<u>Easter Ross</u>	<u>Inverness</u>	<u>Moray &amp; Nairn</u>	<u>Banff</u>	<u>Aberdeen</u>	<u>Kincardine</u>
Group 1	12	-	-	-	-	-	-
Group 2	-	1	1	5	4	-	1
Group 3	-	1	-	-	2	3	1
Group 4	1	1	3	-	-	2	-

Perhaps the distance from the sea and height above sea level of the various farms gives a clearer indication of the type of farm since, generally speaking, the land gets poorer and thinner with increased altitude and distance from the sea. The average figures for these factors are shown in Table II.

TABLE II  
AVERAGE ALTITUDE - DISTANCE FROM THE SEA

	<u>Height Above Sea Level</u>	<u>Distance From Sea</u>
Group 1 - Caithness Farms	162 feet	3 miles
Group 2 - Upland Farms	670 "	16 "
Group 3 - Lowland Farms	215 "	6 "
Group 4 - Hill Farms	693 "	20 "

The Caithness farms are an exception to the general rule and although the soil is quite good the area is a high cost one because of its bleak and unpredictable climate.

SUBSIDIES RECEIVED

The hill cattle subsidy was paid to all farms in Groups 2 and 4 and to all the Caithness farms except one. Marginal land acreage payments were made to 8 Caithness farms, 11 Upland farms and 5 of the farms in Group 4. (The other two hill herds were attached to holdings containing good arable farm land). None of the farms in the lowland group received either the hill cattle subsidy or marginal land acreage payments.

SIZE OF FARM

The average size of farm in the four groups was -

- Group 1 - 108 acres arable + 131 acres rough
- Group 2 - 116 acres arable + 513 acres rough
- Group 3 - 240 acres arable.
- Group 4 - 239 acres arable + 7,900 acres rough.

All the farms in Groups 2 and 4 had some rough land and so did all except one of the Caithness farms.

SIZE OF HERD AND BREEDS

On few of the farms could it be said that calf rearing was the major enterprise since in most cases the cattle were playing second fiddle to sheep or (as in the

farms of Group 3) were kept primarily to make dung for crops of oats or potatoes to be sold off the farm. Hence the number of cows per herd was generally not large and averaged 16 cows for Groups 1, 2 and 3, but the hill herds consisted of an average of 47 cows. Table III demonstrates the small size of Caithness herds in particular, although in no case were there less than six cows in a herd.

TABLE III  
NUMBER OF COWS PER HERD

	<u>Under 10 cows</u>	<u>10 - 19 cows</u>	<u>20 - 29 cows</u>	<u>30 cows &amp; over</u>
Group 1	6 herds	4 herds	-	2 herds
Group 2	2 "	7 "	2 herds	1 "
Group 3	3 "	2 "	2 "	-
Group 4	-	1 "	2 "	4 "

BREED OF COWS

Almost all the cows in the first three groups were either Cross Aberdeen-Angus or Cross Shorthorn with a slight preponderance of Shorthorn cows in Caithness and the lowland farms and rather more Aberdeen-Angus in Group 2 which contains herds from the traditional "Black" area around the Findhorn and the Spey. In the hill herds, Cross Highlanders were dominant in 6 of the herds and Galloways in the remaining herd. Most of the cows wintered inside were tied by the neck but on four farms they were in courts and let out to graze during the day.

BULLS

The Aberdeen Angus breed was most popular in Groups 1, 2 and 3, although there were 11 Shorthorn bulls used and a Hereford was being tried out on one farm.

In Group 4 the Shorthorn was naturally most popular and at least one was used in each herd, whilst three Highland bulls were in use and also one Aberdeen-Angus and one Hereford.

TIME OF BIRTH OF CALVES

It was to be expected that the calves in the hill herds would fall later than those of the other three groups and this is shown to be the case in Table IV in which the percentage of calves born in the various months is set out.

TABLE IV

PERCENTAGE OF CALVES BORN IN VARIOUS MONTHS

1952	Group 1 Caithness Herds	Group 2 Upland Herds	Group 3 Lowland Herds	Group 4 Hill Herds
February (or before)	13	35	36	2
March	39	28	32	24
April	33	27	23	47
May	12	6	8	20
June (or later)	3	4	1	7
	100%	100%	100%	100%

Although early calvings may mean heavier feeding of the cows, they will generally prove worthwhile if the calves are to be sold under a year old. Even when the calves are to be retained on the farm for a longer period, early calvings were thought to be well worthwhile by, for example, most of the farmers in Group 3. Hence it seems that on some of the Caithness farms (Group 1) it would pay the farmers better to aim at earlier calvings especially since there is a tradition of feeding oats in that county even to cows which are not due to calve till the grass comes.

SEASON

This is one of the most important factors influencing the costs, and everywhere the season 1951/52 was good. Crop yields from the 1951 harvest were quite high and turnip yields were heavy on most farms. The winter 1951/52 was short and not very severe and thus there was sufficient winter keep on all farms and in some cases there was a glut of turnips.

On the hill farms the feeding period averaged 24 weeks and on the other farms 25 weeks.

METHOD USED IN COSTING

The aim was to find out the cost of weaned calves in the autumn of 1952 and this has been accomplished by determining the cost of keeping the herd of breeding cows for a year (usually 1st November 1951/52) and dividing by the number of calves reared during the year.

≡ There was a wide variation - 13 to 26 weeks.