

# Is it Best to Raise or Purchase Replacement Heifers?

*published in*

*The Peace River Farmer and Rancher*

**January - 2003**

**By Findlay Pate**

*UF/IFAS, Range Cattle REC*

One of the most difficult practices in cow-calf production is raising replacement heifers.

This is particularly true for cattlemen with small herds and limited resources. They must purchase feed, a primary cost, in bags, blocks, or small lots of liquid supplement delivered to a lick tank. It is also difficult to maintain heifers in separate herds, essential for any heifer breeding/raising program. In contrast, large cow-calf operations can purchase feed and other supplies in bulk lots at sizable cost savings. Large land holdings also allow the management of heifers and young cows in separate herds with minimal problems.

The primary question is cost. Using bagged feed it will cost about \$300 in feed, pasture, veterinary, breeding, interest, and miscellaneous supplies to raise a heifer calf from weaning to a bred heifer at 20 months of age. Thus, a heifer calf valued at \$400 to \$500 at weaning is worth \$700 to \$800 as a 20 month old bred heifer.

Most Florida heifers are bred at two years of age to calve at three. The cost of raising a heifer from weaning to breeding at two years of age is similar to that of yearlings because she is grown slower on less expensive pasture forage and not fed expensive supplements. The problem is that two-year-old heifers are maintained an additional year before calving with an interest cost of \$50. Also, she is grazing pasture that could be used by producing brood cows.

Another important consideration on raising or purchasing replacement heifers

is genetics. Cattlemen with small herds do not or can not purchase bulls with superior genetics due to cost. The quickest and often the best way to obtain good genetics is to purchase good replacement heifers. The \$300 cost of raising your own replacement heifer would go a long way toward paying the premium required to purchase genetically superior animals.

Commercial cattlemen have long recognized the superiority of F-1 females. She will produce a 50 to 100 lb heavier calf at weaning and produce 2 to 3 more calves in her life time. These females are difficult to produce, but at times can be found on the market.

Another advantage of purchasing replacement heifers is that a terminal cross breeding program (all heifers calves sold as feeders) can be used with the brood cow herd. Some feedlots are paying premiums for feeder calves with the ability to make fast and efficient gains. Many Florida cattlemen are presently using Charolais bulls to produce this kind of calf.

In general, commercial cattlemen with small herds (100 brood cows or less) should strongly consider the opportunity to purchase replacement heifers. The Florida Cattlemen's Association and the South Florida Beef/Forage Program jointly sponsor a replacement heifer sale every October. Combinations of open, bred, yearlings, and two-year-old heifers are offered.

Heifers in the above sale are bringing premiums, but they are well worth the cost in terms of future production. Replacement heifer sales are a win-win situation for Florida cattlemen. Sellers can develop programs to specifically raise replacement heifers or have an opportunity to sell heifers normally slated for the feedlot. Buyers have the opportunity to purchase good heifers with the genetics to produce calves that are in demand by feeders and packers.

For questions or comments regarding this publication contact



[Findlay Pate](#)