

# Building Blocks of Beef Production

Grade Level: 3<sup>rd</sup> through 5<sup>th</sup>, adaptable to upper or lower grades

## Activity Synopsis:

Through the use of the Building Blocks of Beef Production game, a Wyoming CattleWoman will be able to tell her agriculture story and introduce students to the seven steps of beef production.

## Objectives:

- Students will recognize and assess the seven stages of beef production and what takes place in each stage.
- Students will learn the basics of beef production, animal welfare and environmental stewardship.
- Students will understand that the stages of beef production ensure safe, nutritious beef to eat.
- Students will hear about the care given to cattle and the environment from first-hand experience.

## Messaging Priorities:

- The seven stages of beef production.
- Beef is raised by hard-working families who are dedicated to their animals, land and to providing America and the world with safe, wholesome and nutritious beef.
- Beef is a safe, wholesome and nutritious food that provides essential nutrients in a balanced diet.

## Materials:

- 15 building block games
- “The Seven Stages of Beef Production” Poster
- Supplemental handouts for students and teachers
- A list of supplemental information for presenters to familiarize themselves with the subject matter

## Advance Preparation:

- Label each of the blocks with 1-7 using a permanent marker. Take special notice of how the blocks go together so you can help the kids put them together.
- Write down and practice reciting your story ahead of time so you don't go over the time limit.
- Use the supplemental materials provided to brush up on your beef industry knowledge.

## Instructions & Tips for Presenting:

- Begin the lesson by introducing yourself and offer a brief overview of your agriculture story.
  - **Helpful tips:** You might break the ice and encourage participation by asking if the students have ever seen a cow. Then ask what agriculture is. Tell the students cattle production is the largest part of Wyoming agriculture. Then tell them about how you raise cattle. You can then segue into cattle being raised for beef. Ask how many like a hamburger, meatloaf, tacos, etc. This will help build some excitement.
- Take the students through the seven stages of beef production. Emphasize in your presentation that farmers, ranchers, packers and retailers make sure to use the best practices possible to care for the animals, the environment and to ensure beef products are safe and healthy.

- ***Helpful tips:*** Relate each step of beef production to something the students know. For example, kids understand pets, so you can compare a calf being vaccinated to having their dog vaccinated. You could also compare weaning to the students' first day of school. Always relate things back to something they might already know.
- Hand out the Building Blocks game to each student and ask them to empty the contents of their bags, being careful not to mix up their blocks with their neighbor's blocks. If you have more than 15 students, have them divide into partners to share a block game.
  - ***IF YOU HAVE MORE TIME:*** Using the Seven Stages of Beef Production Poster, have the students tell the story of beef production to each other while building their blocks. This will reinforce the stages of production corresponding to each block in the game. Once it looks like everyone has their blocks put together, take time to discuss what they learned and answer questions.
    - If some of the student's blocks look like they are put together differently than others, take this opportunity to point out that each cattle operation does things a little differently, but the end result is still safe, nutritious, delicious beef.
  - ***IF YOU HAVE LESS TIME:*** Ask the students to put the blocks together with you as you guide them through the seven stages. While they do this, discuss how each piece is vital to the structure of the beef industry and providing delicious, nutritious beef to feed the world.
- If you haven't included the handouts in your Ag Bags, be sure to distribute them to your students before they leave. Be sure the teachers and helpers have a copy, too!

## Supplemental Information

**NOTE:** Wyoming Ag In The Classroom will soon put together a demonstration video. The video will provide an example of how to use the Building Blocks of Beef Production toolkit. We will e-mail the link and notify local groups as soon as the video becomes available.

### **The Stages of Beef Production (credit: [www.explorebeef.org](http://www.explorebeef.org))**

Beef production represents the largest single segment of American agriculture. In fact, USDA says more farms are classified as beef cattle operations (35%) than any other type.

Raising cattle involves numerous farms and operations, each serving a unique role in the process. At each stage, America's farmers and ranchers strive to provide safe, high-quality beef for consumers while following best practices for raising cattle humanely.

- 1. Cow-Calf Operation** – Beef production begins with ranchers who maintain a breeding herd of cows that nurture calves every year. When a calf is born, it weighs 60 to 100 pounds. Over the next few months, each calf will live off its mother's milk and graze grass in pasture.
- 2. Weaning** – Beef calves are weaned at six to 10 months of age when they weigh between 450 and 700 pounds. These calves are now grass-fed in pasture.
- 3. Stockers and Backgrounders** – After weaning, cattle continue to grow and thrive by grazing during the stocker and backgrounder phase.
- 4. Livestock Auction Markets** – After weaning and/or during the stocker and backgrounder phase, cows are sold at livestock auction markets. About 1/3 of cows stay on the farm for breeding purposes.
- 5. Feedyard** – The next step in beef production is when mature calves are moved to feedyards. Here, they typically spend four to six months, during which time they have constant access to water, room to move around, and are free to graze at feed bunks containing a carefully balanced diet. Veterinarians, nutritionists and cattlemen work together to look after each animal.
- 6. Packing Plant** – Once cattle reach market weight (typically 1,200 to 1,400 pounds and 18 to 22 months of age), they are sent to a processing facility. USDA inspectors are stationed in all federally inspected packing plants and oversee the implementation of safety, animal welfare, and quality standards from the time animals enter the plant until the final beef products are shipped to grocery stores and restaurants establishments.
- 7. Food Service and Retail** – The final step in beef production is when beef is shipped and sold in the United States and abroad. In the retail and food service channels, operators take steps to provide consumers with the most safe, wholesome and nutritious products possible. For delicious recipes for beef, including tips on cooking steak and making the perfect hamburger, visit [BeefItsWhatsForDinner.com](http://BeefItsWhatsForDinner.com).

Proper animal care is the responsibility of everyone in the beef production chain. Beef ranchers recognize that ensuring animal well-being is the right thing to do and critical to their operation's success. For more information, visit the Beef Quality Assurance website at [www.bqa.org](http://www.bqa.org).

### **Links**

[www.explorebeef.org/raisingbeef.aspx](http://www.explorebeef.org/raisingbeef.aspx)

[www.beefitswhatsfordinner.com](http://www.beefitswhatsfordinner.com)

[www.wybeef.com](http://www.wybeef.com)

<http://wyocattlwomen.org/education.htm>

[www.factsaboutbeef.com](http://www.factsaboutbeef.com)

[www.teachfree.org](http://www.teachfree.org)

[www.wyaitc.org](http://www.wyaitc.org)

<http://www.kerncattlwomen.org/education/>

[www.beefnutrition.org](http://www.beefnutrition.org)

[www.ancw.org](http://www.ancw.org)