



# The Finishing Stage:

## *Feeding out Livestock Projects After Their Last Show*

The end of livestock show season is a time for exhibitors to reflect upon the season's outcomes and prepare for their next projects. But before exhibitors can bring home new projects, they will need to prepare their market animals for their last phase before processing: finishing. Market animals are often sold at sales in conjunction with livestock shows or to consumers. To ensure the best quality product for the consumer, be sure to adhere to the withdrawal period of any pharmaceuticals or supplements, feed a complete finishing ration and provide safe, low-stress transportation to the slaughter facility.

### **Withdrawal Period**

Consumers gain assurance in the wholesomeness and safety of the food they purchase when pharmaceuticals are appropriately used in food animal species. A withdrawal period is required from the time antibiotics or feed additives are administered until it is legal to harvest an animal. This allows time for the antibiotic or feed additive residue to exit the animal's system. Be sure to check the label for all products fed to your project to ensure a proper withdrawal period prior to harvest. The Food and Drug Administration (FDA) meticulously evaluates and approves a range of products, including vaccines, antibiotics, feed additives and other pharmaceuticals utilized in food animal species. This rigorous process aims to prevent the entry of potentially harmful residues into the food supply. Selling animals or animal products containing residues surpassing FDA limits is unlawful. Additionally, the FDA establishes withdrawal periods for products to guarantee that animals are free from unacceptable residues upon marketing.

### **Finishing Phase**

Upon marketing, providing adequate nutrition in the form of a complete ration is necessary throughout the animal's life to provide a high-value product to the consumer. Complete finishing rations will contain a high percentage of concentrates (corn, grain sorghum, corn gluten, dried distiller grains, cottonseed meal, etc.) along with vitamins, minerals and water. Do not forget that when feeding ruminants (sheep, goats, cattle), roughages (cottonseed hulls, hay, pasture, etc.) should always be included in their diet, even in finishing rations.

To effectively change the flavor profile, a concentrate-based finishing diet should be fed for a minimum of 60 days leading up to harvest. Concentrates increase fat deposition, thus leading to increased marbling and subsequently increased quality grades of meat.

#### **Tips to remember during the finishing phase:**

- Plan ahead to identify a processor and harvest date in the early stages of your project.
- Make any and all changes to your project's diet gradually.
- Provide fresh water at all times.

Your local 4-H or extension agent can help you decide on a ration that best fits your livestock project at each stage of development, including the finishing phase.

### **Safe Handling**

In preparation of moving the animal from the feeding facility to the slaughter facility, animals



While in the finishing stage, it is important to continue to monitor nutrition, health and handling to insure a safe and wholesome end product. *Photo by Thomas Patton*

should fast for 16-24 hours prior to transport. Studies have revealed that poor handling practices at the farm, during transport and at the slaughter plant, have an adverse effect on animals. Additionally, poor preharvest handling can lead to losses in carcass value as well as reduced yield, presence of lesions, bacterial contamination or meat quality defects (e.g., pale, soft, exudative, and dark, firm, dry pork).

## Summary

Providing a high quality, wholesome meat product requires proper nutrition, health and handling throughout the animal's lifetime. Your local agent can assist you with this as you work with your project each year. Be aware of withdrawal periods when any pharmaceuticals are utilized. Finally, remember that safe handling and transportation are essential to reducing stress and maintaining meat quality.

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## References

On-Farm Finishing for [Beef Cattle On-Farm Finishing for Beef Cattle \(tennessee.edu\)](http://www.tennessee.edu)

Preslaughter handling practices and their effects on animal welfare and pork quality [Preslaughter handling practices and their effects on animal welfare and pork quality - PMC \(nih.gov\)](http://www.nih.gov)

Raising Freezer Beef: How to Feed Grain-Finished Beef [Raising Freezer Beef: How To Feed Grain-Finished Beef \(sdstate.edu\)](http://www.sdstate.edu)

USDA FSIS: Beef from Farm to Table [Beef From Farm to Table | Food Safety and Inspection Service \(usda.gov\)](http://www.usda.gov)

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## AUTHORS

Hannah Devall, Louisiana 4-H Instructor,  
Animal Science and Agriculture  
Literacy/Awareness Specialist

Dr. Ashley Edwards,  
Extension Livestock Specialist



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