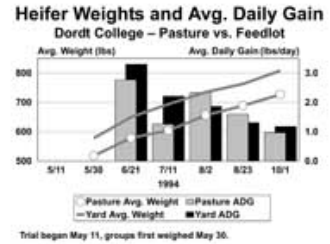


Pasture Versus Feedlot for Dairy Heifers

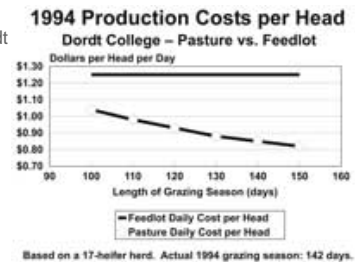
Figure 4. Pasture and feedlot heifer weights and average daily gain in the 1994 Dordt College trial.



The Dordt College Agricultural Stewardship Center has long had a strong dairy program. In 1994 they took their first steps in management intensive grazing. With support from PFI Sustainable Projects, the Stewardship Center carried out a comparison of feedlot and rotationally grazed Holstein heifers. A group of 23 animals was divided in May for the two treatments. Six animals remained in the lot, while 17 were put out to pasture. The first year’s results appear in Figures 4 and 5.

Figure 4 shows that average daily gain was sometimes higher in the pasture setting, sometimes in the feedlot. It also shows that there was a difference in average weight right from the beginning of the trial. Larger animals were selected for the feedlot because of involvement with a local business on another project. In the future, animals will be selected randomly for the two treatment groups in order to make a truer comparison.

Figure 5. Projected production costs as the grazing season lengthens, 1994 Dordt College trial.



The figure also starts at May 11, although weights are not shown until May 30. Animals went to pasture on May 11, but individual weights were not taken until nineteen days later. This makes it difficult to put absolute profit figures to the treatments, since the weight gain of the two groups is not known for the first period. However, student Lee DeHaan has done a good job of deriving the cost side of the equation. Feedlot costs per head are constant through the season. However, daily production cost for heifers on pasture decreases as fixed costs are spread across the lengthening grazing season (Figure 5). These first-year results should catch the attention of Sioux County dairy farmers looking for a better bottom line.