Hi! I’m cowboy Caden. I am ten years old and raise cattle in Nebraska. My mom grew up raising cattle just like her dad (my grandpa) did. I guess you can say I am carrying on the family tradition.

My favorite time of the year is when the cows have their calves. We wait almost ten months for the calf to arrive. The whole time we wonder what color the calf will be, if it is a heifer or a bull, and how much it will weigh. There is nothing more exciting than when one of your cows is having a calf!

We take pride in caring for our animals. We believe meat is better when the animals get good care. We make sure our herd of cattle have plenty of room to roam and grow, clean and fresh water at all times, and a good balanced diet. A herd is a group of cattle.

People do not realize cattle ranching is not a 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. job. There are times of the year when we work around the clock. During calving season, my parents get up at all hours of the night to check on cattle, to help them give birth. During the summer and winter, we do all we can to keep them comfortable. Yes, even in the middle of a blizzard, my parents are hauling hay to our cows and breaking the ice off their water, so they have something to eat and drink.

Taking care of our cattle is more than just a job to us – it is a way of life.

Discover through this Beef Reader why my family takes pride in raising beef for you to enjoy.
Talk Like a Rancher

If you ever listen to farmers and ranchers talk, they have different names for their cattle. Did you know all cattle have a different name depending on how old they are and if they are a male or female? You can tell the difference by looking at their body size and structure. Below are a couple of the common terms used:

**MATCH THE LETTER OF THE PICTURE WITH THE CORRECT TERM BELOW:**

1. Bull - male or a father bovine ______
2. Heifer - young female from birth to just before she has had a calf ______
3. Cow - female that has had a calf ______
4. Steer - neutered male bovine ______
5. Calf - young male or female bovine ______

**EXTRA ACTIVITY:**

Did you know beef cattle can be different colors? Just like there are breeds of dogs, there are cattle breeds. The word breed refers to cattle with similar characteristics.

Research all the different types of cattle breeds in the United States and report back to your class.

Cattle Jokes

What do you call a cow that eats grass?
A LAWN MOO-ER

What are cattle’s favorite games to play?
MOO-NOPOLY AND MAR-BULLS

What is another name for a cowhand?
HAMMER HELPER

What do you call it when one bull spies on another bull?
A STEAK-OUT

What do you call a sleeping bull?
A BULL DOZER

Where do steers go to dance?
TO THE MEAT BALL

What do you call a cow with a good sense of humor?
LAUGHING STOCK

©2017 - The Beef Reader publication is part of the Nebraska Farm Bureau Foundation’s Nebraska Agriculture in the Classroom program.

The mission of the Nebraska Farm Bureau Foundation is to engage youth, educators, and the general public to promote an understanding of the vital importance of agriculture in the lives of all Nebraskans.

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FROM OUR FARM TO YOUR FORK

Did you know almost everything you eat started on a farm? Follow me on a beef adventure from my farm to your fork.

STAGE 1 - THE FARM
Here is where the calves are born. The calves will live with the cows until they reach about 500-600 pounds. At this time they are big enough to live on their own and are separated from the cow. This is called weaning. Some of the heifer calves will be kept on the farm to replace some of the older cows. These are called replacement heifers. The rest of the calves will be sold to a backgrounder.

STAGE 2 - BACKGROUNDER
At this stage the calves eat and grow for four to five months. If you see calves roaming in a pasture or in a field of harvested corn, they probably belong to a backgrounder. When the calves weigh around 800 pounds they are then sold to a feedlot operator.

STAGE 3 - FEEDLOT
At the feedlot calves are fed special food mixtures (rations) that help them grow large and muscular without becoming too fat. They usually spend four to five months at a feedlot. Cattle in the feedlot eat enough to gain three to four pounds each day. Once they reach 1,200 pounds they are sold to a packer.

STAGE 4 - PACKER
The packer is the one who processes the cattle into delicious cuts of meat and other products. The packer then sells the meat and beef products to a retailer.

STAGE 5 - RETAILER/GROCERY STORE
Retailers are the ones who sell food to your grocery store for you to buy. Retailers look for the freshest, best quality meats available. Did you know all meat that is sold must be inspected by the federal government to make sure it is safe for you to eat?

STAGE 6 - YOUR HOUSE
Your family purchases the beef products from the grocery store and takes it home for your dinner. And this is how beef makes it into your house. Beef – it’s what’s for dinner!

EXTRA ACTIVITY: With your class, discuss the role of producers, consumers, and decomposers in an ecosystem and answer the question: If cattle producers started to raise less cattle, what would happen to the price of meat for the consumer?
Dear Journal,

Today was a busy day. Right when I got up I had to get dressed for my baseball game. Of course, I couldn’t find my sports bag that had my baseball shoes, mitt, and baseballs in it. I finally found it on the desk in my room. It was hidden under all the papers, crayons, and glue.

We were running late as usual because my sister and Dad take so long to get ready. My sister has to shampoo and condition her hair and put on her make-up, including her signature bright red lipstick! Today must have been the day Dad needed to shave because I heard Mom complaining about the shaving cream that was all over the bathroom.

My baseball team won the game! To celebrate, we all went out to a local restaurant to eat cheeseburgers, hamburger pizza, and tacos. I ate way too much!

We are now home and Mom decided to wax the floor. I love it when she does this because when I play fetch with Lucky my dog, he slides across the floor chasing after his rawhide chew toy. It is very funny to watch him.

Dad finally finished painting the walls in my new room. It sure looks nice, but it sure smells. Mom lit candles all over the house to try to get rid of the smell.

Well, I am going to snack on some beef jerky and Jell-O before violin lessons. Now where did I put my violin?

Until tomorrow,

Caden

BEEF READER | GRADES 3-6

Read the information below and then find the products we get from beef in Caden’s journal entry.

Virtually the entire steer (99%) is used for something, but only 41% of it is used as meat. The rest of the steer is used to provide by-products, which are uses of beef other than meat.

BEEF YOU EAT

A person usually thinks that all we get from beef is the delicious steak or hamburger. But there are other edible parts we eat besides the protein-packed muscle. The variety meats, such as liver and heart, are just two of the many tasty alternatives that are used in gourmet dishes.

There are also edible by-products that are not quite so obvious.

Did you know that gelatins in products such as ice cream and yogurt are made from the hooves, horns, hide, and bones of the cow?

Cattle provide a portion of the ingredients in manufactured products such as chewing gum. People depend on cattle for ingredients to make food products such as: sausage, marshmallows, candies, mayonnaise, chewing gum, shortening, clarification agents for juice, cookies, and gelatin found in salads and desserts.

BEEF IN YOUR HOME AND SCHOOL

Did you get ready with beef this morning? Yes you did!

The soap, shampoo, and conditioner you used in your hair and the toothpaste you used all may contain a beef by-product. You can also find beef by-products in cosmetics such as lipsticks, shaving creams, and deodorants.

Around the house we use beef products in many items. A few of these are leather sports equipment, luggage, boots and shoes, dog chews, candles, textiles, floor wax, insecticides, plastics, paint on the walls, violin strings, many medicines, tires, and bone china.

At school, beef by-products are found in piano keys, glue, crayons, and in the ink in your books!

CAN YOU CIRCLE ALL THE PRODUCTS WE GET FROM BEEF IN CADEN’S JOURNAL ENTRY?

CADEN’S JOURNAL

Saturday, July 23

Dear Journal,

Today was a busy day. Right when I got up I had to get dressed for my baseball game. Of course, I couldn’t find my sports bag that had my baseball shoes, mitt, and baseballs in it. I finally found it on the desk in my room. It was hidden under all the papers, crayons, and glue.

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Well, I am going to snack on some beef jerky and Jell-O before violin lessons. Now where did I put my violin?

Until tomorrow,

Caden
We all know that cattle provide us with very nutritious meat and other resources, but many do not realize that cattle are good for our planet, too!

Cattle graze on the land that can't be used for anything else because it is too steep or hilly to build on or too dry or rocky to grow food on. This land would go to waste if it wasn't for cattle!

When cattle are properly grazed, they help out the land by aerating the soil with their hooves. Aerate means to loosen up the soil. By doing this, it lets more oxygen into the soil. This helps plants and grasses grow better. Also, when the soil is soft and not hard, it is easier for it to absorb water and nutrients.

Cattle also help press grass seed into the soil. Seeds must have soil around them to start growing properly. Cattle also provide natural fertilizer in the form of manure to help these seeds grow.

What do you do to help out the planet?

____________________________________________________

____________________________________________________

Was one of your answers recycle? Did you know cattle recycle too? They eat leftovers of all types of food production, such as fruit pits, potato peels, almond hulls, and sugar beet pulp. This reduces landfill waste while making high quality protein.

**FACTS**

Did you know Nebraska's farmers and ranchers care for 45.5 million acres of land?

That is 93 percent of the state's total land area!

**EXTRA ACTIVITY**

Shade in 93 percent of the state of Nebraska below to show how much land is used by farmers and ranchers.

**ONE COWHIDE CAN MAKE**

- **20 FOOTBALLS**
- **144 BASEBALLS**
- **18 VOLLEYBALLS**
- **12 SOCCER BALLS**
- **12 BASEBALL GLOVES**
- **12 BASKETBALLS**

*One cowhide can make any one set of the sports items pictured.*
Nutrients in some of your favorite foods actually help your brain grow and develop. So eat beef and get your **ZIP** every day!

**Zinc** helps you think and improves things like memory and paying attention. At the same time it’s helping to increase your brain power. Zinc helps heal your injuries and strengthens your body to fight colds.

**Iron** helps your brain by supplying oxygen. People with less iron in their diet score lower on problem-solving tests. You also need iron to fuel everyday physical activity.

**Protein** builds and repairs all your body’s tissue and keeps your muscles strong. Protein can also be a source of energy for your body.

When it comes to nutrition and a healthy lifestyle, there are three things to remember:
- moderation
- variety
- exercise

**CHEESY SLOPPY JOE BEEF CUPS**

**Ingredients**
- 1 lb ground beef
- 1 (8 oz) can refrigerated buttermilk biscuits
- 1 small onion, chopped
- 1-2 Tbs. minced garlic
- 1/4 c. taco seasoning mix
- 1/2 c. water
- 1/2 c. canned sloppy Joe sandwich sauce
- 1 c. shredded Mexican cheese blend
- Salt and pepper

**Toppings**
- Shredded lettuce
- Chopped tomato
- Shredded Mexican cheese blend
- Sour Cream
- Black olives

**Instructions**
1. Heat oven to 350°F. Separate biscuits and press each into a 3 1/2” circle. Place over the underside of a standard-size muffin pan, pressing around cup to shape into bowl. Bake for 12-15 min. until browned. Remove baked cups onto a platter.
2. Meanwhile in a skillet brown the beef with onions and garlic; season with salt and pepper. Add in taco seasoning, water, and sloppy Joe sauce; simmer for 6-7 min. or until hot and bubbly, stirring occasionally. Stir in 1 c. of cheese.
3. Spoon beef mixture evenly into cups. Top with lettuce, tomato, and more shredded cheese. Add other desired toppings.

**Total recipe time:** 30 minutes  
**Servings:** 8 taco cups

**MOO MATH**

1. One cowhide can be made into 144 baseballs, 20 footballs, 18 soccer balls, 18 volleyballs, 12 basketballs, or 12 baseball gloves.
   If there are 72 footballs used in the Super Bowl, how many cowhides are used? ________________

2. One pound of hamburger can make how many “quarter-pound” burgers? ________________

3. Using greater than, less than, or equal to symbols, determine which of these are bigger:
   - One Quarter-Pound Burger ________________ Two Eighth-Pound Burgers
   - One Twelve-Ounce Steak ________________ Six Three-Ounce Steaks

4. If one pound of hamburger costs $4.00 and you use it to make five burgers:
   What is the price for each burger? ________________

5. If your feed costs $50 for every 100 pounds your steer weighs, how much money will you have invested to raise a 750-pound steer? ________________

6. When a calf was born it weighed 80 pounds. One year later it weighed 828 pounds.
   How many pounds did the calf gain in one year? ________________  per day? ________________
MAKING A BRAND FOR YOURSELF THE COWBOY WAY

How do you show that your lunch box, homework, or backpack belongs to you? I bet you said you put your name on your belongings to show it belongs to you. Cattle identification works the same way. Today, some ranchers use ear tags and electronic ID’s instead of hot brands. The ear tags and electronic ID’s identify the animals owner and information about its location and health. For a rancher to show that they own a cow, they must put their “mark” on it. Without the brand, ranchers can’t prove that cattle belong to them. If their cattle went through a fence onto another ranch, no one would know who owned them. It would be too difficult to put an entire name, so ranchers develop a brand that is a simple and unique symbol. All brands must be registered with the government and no two brands may be identical. There is a special way to read a brand, so that any rancher looking at another rancher’s brand knows what it says. Get ready to read brands and to make your own!

HOW TO READ A BRAND:

Brands typically use letters, numbers, shapes, and lines. Simple outlines of familiar objects such as quarter moon, sun, diamond, triangle, or heart can be used. Often these relate to an owner’s name or interests. Brands are read from left to right, top to bottom, and outside to inside. The position of the letter(s) determine how the brand is read. For example: “Tumbling” is turned partially on its face or back; “Lazy” is on its side in a horizontal position; “Reverse” is backwards. Below are some examples of brands:

1. Left to Right
   - R
     “R” Ranch
   - \( \backslash \)
     Tumbling Left L Ranch
   - \( \infty \)
     Lazy 8 Ranch
   - D
     Reverse D Ranch
   - A
     Walking A Ranch
2. Top to Bottom
   - C
     Half Circle C Ranch
   - 7
     Bar 7 Ranch
   - S
     SG Ranch
3. Outside to Inside
   - U
     Diamond U Ranch
   - 2
     Box 2 Ranch
   - E
     Rocking E Ranch

Read the brands below and write the name of the brand:

- 9
- 5
- K

BUILD YOUR OWN BRAND

Use the guidelines above to design your own brand using one or more initials from your name. As you design your brand, think about your own interests and activities. Then draw it on the bull to the right. A brand may be on the calves hindquarters or shoulder. Have one person write the class members’ brands on a chalkboard to see how many you can identify.

What is your brand’s name?

__________________________________________
A TIMELINE FOR CATTLE RANCHING

Cattle ranching can be described as ... “the year-round care of cows and bulls for the purpose of producing calves to raise for food and by-products.” It is that, but it’s really much more. Ranchers must also be stewards of the land. That means they care for soils, grasses, other plants, water, and wildlife habitat.

Range and pasture land is used by the rancher to collect sunlight. Sunlight, soil, and water grow grasses and other plants. We might like to look out and see the open spaces, but we can’t eat those plants. The rancher uses cows to harvest the grasses. Cows turn the grass into a source of high-protein food and other by-products we can use.

Today, Nebraska’s cattle industry is one of the state’s top agricultural industries, and it continues as a top segment of American agriculture. Agricultural animals have always made a major contribution to the welfare of human societies by providing food, shelter, fuel, fertilizer, and many other products and services.

Cattle ranchers (and all livestock owners) work very hard to take proper care of their animals. They provide the cattle with nutritious food like hay, grain, and corn; clean water; shelter; and medical care. A successful rancher wears many hats - cowboy, herdsman, nutritionist, businessperson, land manager, and financial manager among others.

JANUARY - APRIL

A cow will give birth to her calf any time between the months of January and April. A cow’s due date depends on when she was bred. Newborn calves normally weigh 60 pounds or more. This is the time of year ranchers call “calving season.”

JUNE - OCTOBER

All of the cow and calf pairs are either trailed by horseback or hauled by truck and trailer to summer pasture. They will spend the next few months grazing the green pastures to gain weight and grow healthy and strong. Bulls are turned out with the cows for breeding. There are approximately 25 cows for one bull.

MAY

BRANDING

Cows and calves are gathered from their summer grazing areas. The calves (now weighing approximately 500-600 pounds) are “weaned,” or separated from their mothers. The mother cows are taken back to the ranch and turned out on pasture. The calves are taken to separate pastures.

MID-OCTOBER

WEANING

Calves are gathered again and sorted by the rancher. Most calves will be sold. The best female calves and heifers are kept by the ranchers to join their cattle herds.

NOVEMBER

Sorting

Pregnant cows are moved from pastures to pens near barns. These areas provide shelter from winter weather. Ranchers feed the cows hay. The cows are now nearby and can be helped if any of them calve early.

DECEMBER

WINTER FEEDING

Pregnant cows are moved from pastures to pens near barns. These areas provide shelter from winter weather. Ranchers feed the cows hay. The cows are now nearby and can be helped if any of them calve early.