

The Dexter Beef Advantage

Beef Production at Dexter Scale

SILVER MAPLE DEXTERS | BREEDER'S GUIDANCE

Flavor, tenderness, and portion size will always lead the case for Dexter beef. There is a reason Dexter beef is called the King of Beef.

But eating quality is not the only Dexter beef advantage.

Silver Maple Dexters processed our first Dexter steer in 2002. Across nearly a quarter century of beef production since then, the Dexter beef stock bred, reared, and finished on our farm have produced the following averages:¹

Age at processing	18.9 months
Live weight	755 pounds
Hanging weight	451 pounds
Packaged beef	258 pounds

That works out to 59.7 percent live-to-hanging yield and 57.2 percent hanging-to-packaged yield (cutout).

Over most of this time, our cutting instructions have been primarily bone-out. The packaged weight therefore represents, to a considerable degree, the beef going into the freezer rather than pounds retained as bone.

Our packaged yield also reflects how we prefer to process our beef. We request approximately 21 days of aging before cutting. Both the primarily bone-out cutting instructions and the extended aging period reduce the final packaged weight. Boning removes pounds that would otherwise remain with the cuts, while aging produces additional moisture loss before the carcass is cut. We accept some loss on the final scale in exchange for the product we want in the freezer.

Two hundred fifty-eight pounds of primarily boneless packaged beef from a 755-pound Dexter processed before nineteen months of age.

That is a substantial amount of top-quality beef from a remarkably compact animal, brought efficiently to finish at a young age.

Those results reflect a breeding purpose and philosophy that have guided Silver Maple Dexters from the beginning.

Our objective has never been simply to make cattle heavier. More live weight can always be produced by adding more frame. That is a different breeding objective.

Our work has focused on improving beef production within the Dexter breed.

At Silver Maple Dexters, beef production begins with the dam.

SMD cows have long been selected for the quantity and quality of milk they produce. Their calves receive an exceptional nutritional start during the period when maternal performance can contribute substantially to early growth.

¹ N=46

The first feedlot at Silver Maple Dexters is the cow.

At weaning, our calves are backgrounded for four months to maintain steady growth during the transition from their dams. From there, they spend most of their growing period utilizing pasture and forage. Animals destined for beef receive a relatively light grain finish during roughly the final 90 days before processing.

The combination of deliberate breeding, maternal production, purposeful backgrounding, growth on quality forage, and a moderate finishing protocol has allowed us to produce cattle that reach our beef-production goals within 19 months while remaining distinctly Dexter in size and type.

That is an important part of what a dual-purpose breed can do.

One of our objectives has been to improve beef production in the Dexter, not by adding frame, but by selecting cattle that make better use of the frame they have.

We find that more telling than the notion that a Dexter must become larger in order to produce substantial quantities of high-quality beef.

There is also a practical market-niche advantage to the scale of the finished product from a right-sized Dexter.

For the customer, 258 pounds of primarily boneless packaged beef is a substantial amount of beef, but still a manageable whole-beef purchase. The cuts are appropriately sized, freezer requirements are reasonable, and a customer can purchase the entire animal rather than being limited to a half or quarter share. That means receiving the full assortment of cuts from the carcass while avoiding the much larger volume that comes with a conventional large-framed beef animal.

That niche matters for us and for the breed.

The Dexter does not need to compete with large commercial beef breeds by attempting to become a smaller version of them. Those breeds already exist in abundance and have been selected exceptionally well for maximum individual weight and large carcass production.

If your objective is simply to maximize pounds, or pounds gained per day, logic and reason point to another breed. There are breeds designed exceptionally well to do exactly that.

The Dexter brings something different and better to the table.

A properly made Dexter concentrates a remarkable amount of function into a small frame.

Our years of Dexter beef production have given us no reason to regard increasing frame size as a prerequisite for increasing beef production. Nor do we see much purpose in simply pursuing more pounds for their own sake.

We established our long-term beef-production goal long ago:

Dexter stock that produces steers that consistently finish to a 500-pound carcass at 60 percent cutout of Choice or better beef in 19 months with a 90-day light finish ration.

That goal was deliberately set within the size, type, purpose, and history of the Dexter breed. It asks a great deal of a small dual-purpose animal, but it does not require turning that animal into something larger.

Our beef production averages now stand at a 451-pound hanging weight, a 57.2 percent cutout, and 18.9 months to processing.

We are approaching the beef production objective we set for the herd. There will always be room to improve consistency, carcass quality, cutout, and the economy of the finishing period. We see considerably less reason to keep adding frame once the animal is meeting that objective while remaining firmly within Dexter size, type, and breed standard.

The object is not to discover how large we can make a Dexter.

It is to discover how much a Dexter can do while remaining a Dexter.