Our Take on Management of Dual Purpose Dexters:
Part 1 - Feeding and Nutrition

Yes, Dexter cattle require management and the better so the better the results. Under management of our herd we include; nutrition and feeding, handling and training, stocking rates, vaccination/health, breeding, calving, weaning, and growing pasture and winter forage. This is a brief description of our feed and nutrition program for 3 specific goals.

Feeding and nutrition as a part of herd management includes providing our cattle with the optimal level of nutrition at their specific life stage in order to: 1) fully achieve their genetic potential, 2) maintain optimal health, and 3) meet specific production goals.

Fully Achieving Genetic Potential

We try to schedule our calving during the spring and early summer so as to take full advantage of the lush forage period here in Nebraska and do not supplement our momma cows if they are not being milked. We rotationally graze and try to maintain optimal forage for our momma cows in order for them to maximally feed their calves. We maintain calves on the cow for 6 months and then fence-line wean with calves in lot and provide 2 months background feeding of weaned calves with high quality mixed grass and legume hay and morning and evening feeding of ¼ to ½ lb of 14% protein stocker/grower feed. This is also when we dehorn, vaccinate, and begin halter training. During our background feeding period our weaned stock maintain an ascending growth plane and are not set back by decreases or deficiencies in nutrition or increased stress. Under this regimen, we believe we have given our calves the optimal environment for their genetic potential to begin full expression and that this early start continues with them throughout their life cycle.

Maintain in Optimal Health

Animals (heifers and steers) graduating from our background feeding enter the cow herd, (we have somewhat different management for bulls after back-grounding), in late winter or early spring at which time they enter the regular pasture rotation. Yearling show stock are retained in lot until completion of show season and continue a modified back-grounding routine depending upon the specific animal. Our feeding of winter forage to our cows and bulls typically begins in mid to late November. Our winter forage is large round bales of good quality home-grown alfalfa with some large round bales of very good home-grown cool season/mixed legume hay. With our current herd of 10 momma cows and 2 bulls we feed 3 rounds (1,200#) approximately every 2 weeks. In addition, we maintain through-out the winter a 20% protein low-moisture supplement tub with basic minerals.

During the spring, summer and fall rotational grazing period our cows with calves are maintained (God willing and precipitation is adequate) in our rotationally grazed paddocks with a complete mineral provided at all times. No further feeding to our non-milking, non-show stock is provided. After breeding season begins we typically lot the bull/s and feed hay for much of summer until breeding season is complete.

Our mature cow show string for the year are with the regular herd and brought in if needed 1x a day for supplemental feeding as needed on a per animal basis. This show feed program is approximately 1/3 a gallon of 14% protein stock feed.

We deworm once in the late winter and once in the fall.

Meet Specific Production Goals

For our beef production, we have identified that our goal is to produce a 500 lb carcass in 18 to 19 months of age. Currently we are at a 447 lbs average at 18.7 months of age. To achieve these results our steer

program is as follows: Six months on dam and 2 to 3 months back-ground feeding as described above. Followed by return to the cow herd in late winter and maintained on winter feed program as described above. In early to late fall depending upon steers age they are removed from the rotational grazing and placed in lot for final finish for approximately two months and provided twice a day feeding of mixed grass/legume hay – as much as they will clean up between feedings and an increasing amount of 14% protein feed mixed with cracked corn. The grain supplement begins at about a 75/25 protein to corn ratio and ends at 75/25 corn to protein ratio. The amount provided each feeding initially is one standard coffee can of 14% and ¼ can of corn and gradually increases to finish with approximately 3 cans of corn and 1 can of 14%. We have at times also incorporated home-grown oats in this ration but have not done so recently.

For our milk production we have identified that our goal is to produce cows that will provide a daily average of 3 gallons over a 210 day lactation. We do not milk all of our cows every year. For the past 5 years we have had various cows we milk for our home use and typically have 2 primary milkers, that vary, each year. Our goal of 3 gallon as an average was established to be within the range of the Dexter breed but on the upper side and an amount that was sufficient from 1 cow for a family of 4 without very high supplementation requirements. Our milk cow string is kept with the regular rotationally grazing herd and brought in for milking once or twice a day depending upon our need. The feed provided to our milk cows, if not also a part of the show string, is our standard 14% stocker feed at approximately 2/3 to 1-gallon at milking time.

This is our feed and nutrition program to meet our three objectives: full genetic potential, maintain optimal health, and specific production goals. This nutrition and feeding management plan is not for the person who only wants to occasionally interact with their cows. This program requires twice a day, every day attention but we enjoy both the interaction and the results in the pasture, the plate, and the glass. We also have tremendous neighbors that give us a hand when we are away showing our cows!

We hope this brief overview of Silver Maple Dexter management program specific to feeding and nutrition is beneficial. We'd love to hear your programs, your input on things we might want to consider, or questions you have.