

# Livestock Alternatives for Small Farms - Beef

## Martha Mewbourne

Farmer

Nickelsville, Virginia

This discussion will focus on alternative marketing opportunities for small beef cattle farmers in Southwest Virginia/Northeast Tennessee. Traditional southeastern cow/calf producers consistently face the problem of "having to take" the least amount possible for their calves. Most of these farmers have fewer than fifty cows and thus must either sell through the stockyards or try to group a similar lot with their neighbors or a marketing group.

Options for the small cow/calf or stocker producer can include direct-marketing beef in either wholes, halves, or retail cuts as either a fresh or frozen product. By developing a niche market product (hormone-free, antibiotic-free beef) and selling directly, this late life farmer has been able to successfully make about twice as much per sold calf.

At present there are no other producers in the Southwest Virginia/Northeast Tennessee region direct-selling locally produced, USDA-inspected specialty beef. The demand is greater than the supply. The presenter will discuss production, pricing, packaging, and promotion strategies. Regulatory restrictions, insurance issues, and marketing techniques will be identified.

This successful small farmer has demonstrated that the old philosophy of "we've always done it this way" is not always the best way. Her new approach to cattle marketing has brought her a greater sense of product pride as well as greater financial rewards.