

What's it Cost to Raise Heifers?

The answer in the last nine years has changed dramatically due to rising labor, fuel, feed and other costs. According to a study by UW-Madison conducted in 2007, the cost to raise a heifer to freshening has increased 57%. The farms studied have similar management techniques that are used in Northeast Iowa. The study was conducted using three different operation types: tie-stall barns, free stall barns, and a custom heifer raiser. The average cost to raise animals from weaning to freshening for each operation type is as follows:

Tie-stall: \$1,416.33; Free stall: \$1361.57; Custom raiser: \$1113.90* *(often a smaller heifer on average)

Custom heifer raisers would at first glance appear to be the most profitable. However, several factors need to be taken into consideration. First, the custom heifer raiser has a system that is designed to be efficient in labor and management. Custom heifer raisers also feed animals for a shorter amount of time (on average 60-90 days shorter) than the average producer. Weaning calves at an earlier age and returning replacements two to three months before calving help reduce costs. Custom raisers also on average freshened heifers earlier than the two dairy operation types.

On average it costs \$ 2.04 a day from weaning to freshening. The costs ranged from \$1.31 to \$2.93 per head per day. This is not yet including the calf itself (\$500) and the cost to get it to weaning (\$326 for a calf weaned at 8 weeks or \$5.82/day). Daily cost per head based on size varies considerably due to feed and other costs. Feed intake for heifers can be estimated at about 2.5% of bodyweight without wastage. Below is a table that breaks down average costs for age and weight:

Approximate		Variable Cost (\$/Head/day)											Fixed Cost (\$/Head/Day)			Allocated Costs
Weight (lbs)	Age (mo)	Feed	Bedding	Vet &Med	Breeding	Electric &Fuel	Paid Labor	Unpaid Labor	Paid Mgt	Unpaid Mgt	Interest	Death	Equip	Buildings	Manure	(\$/head/day)
215	2.5	0.90	0.11	0.08	0.00	0.01	0.19	0.08	0.02	0.01	0.09	0.002	0.01	0.23	0.01	1.74
309	3.0	0.83	0.10	0.08	0.00	0.02	0.20	0.09	0.02	0.03	0.08	0.003	0.02	0.17	0.02	1.66
398	5.5	0.81	0.09	0.06	0.00	0.03	0.16	0.11	0.04	0.03	0.08	0.004	0.02	0.24	0.03	1.70
514	8.0	0.86	0.05	0.05	0.00	0.04	0.19	0.11	0.01	0.03	0.08	0.005	0.03	0.14	0.02	1.62
618	10.0	0.92	0.04	0.05	0.03	0.04	0.20	0.07	0.02	0.02	0.09	0.002	0.01	0.20	0.05	1.74
705	11.5	0.97	0.06	0.05	0.05	0.05	0.15	0.16	0.01	0.03	0.09	0.006	0.02	0.21	0.03	1.89
815	13.5	1.00	0.05	0.05	0.30	0.06	0.23	0.22	0.02	0.02	0.12	0.007	0.01	0.21	0.03	2.33
896	15.0	1.07	0.04	0.06	0.16	0.06	0.33	0.21	0.06	0.03	0.11	0.004	0.02	0.20	0.10	2.45
1016	18.0	1.18	0.03	0.03	0.27	0.07	0.16	0.24	0.01	0.04	0.13	0.005	0.01	0.17	0.03	2.38
1114	19.5	1.17	0.07	0.05	0.08	0.08	0.23	0.10	0.05	0.02	0.12	0.003	0.03	0.23	0.05	2.28
1209	21.5	1.58	0.08	0.05	0.00	0.08	0.15	0.10	0.02	0.02	0.14	0.002	0.02	0.24	0.12	2.60

*Zwald, A.et al. 2007. "The effect of body weight and age on variable, fixed and allocated costs associated with raising one heifer on a Wisconsin dairy and custom heifer operations."Economic Costs and Labor Efficiencies Associated with Raising Dairy Herd Replacements on Wisconsin Dairy Farms and Custom Heifer Raising Operations. University of Wisconsin Madison.

ISU Extension Heifer Cost Slide Rule: Using 2007 and 2008 feed prices

A 700 lb heifer is estimated to cost around \$1.90 per day with a 15 cent slide upward or a 10 cent slide downward for each 100 lbs. of bodyweight (after weaning). Breeding costs are not included. This figure will vary greatly, even up to 50 cents per head per day depending upon management! Thus, it is important to know your costs whether raising yours or someone else's heifers.

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