

## DUNDY COUNTY, NE-A-GREAT LOCATION FOR CATTLE FEEDING OPERATIONS

Dundy County, located in the southwestern corner of Nebraska, has emerged as a prime location for cattle feeding operations due to a combination of favorable environmental conditions, abundant agricultural resources, strategic infrastructure, and innovative sustainability practices. With a population of just over 1,600 and covering nearly 920 square miles, this rural county exemplifies the High Plains' potential for large-scale livestock production. One of the primary advantages is the availability of feed, particularly corn, which forms the backbone of cattle rations in feedlots. Dundy County benefits from irrigation sourced from the Ogallala Aquifer, a critical groundwater resource underlying the region. This enables substantial corn production, with 53,542 acres harvested for grain in 2022 according to USDA data, alongside other feed crops like sorghum (5,936 acres) and forage (18,405 acres). The county's agricultural landscape includes 527,593 acres in farms, of which 56,485 acres are irrigated (about 11%), supporting high-yield crop production despite the semi-arid environment. Area feedlots utilize nearly every bushel of local corn and may import additional supplies from surrounding areas, capitalizing on Nebraska's position as a top corn-producing state. This proximity to feed reduces transportation costs and ensures a reliable, cost-effective supply chain for feedlot operations.

The arid climate further enhances suitability for cattle feeding. Dundy County's semi-arid conditions, with hot summers (average highs around 80°F in Benkelman) and cold, windy winters, minimize mud formation in pens—a common issue in wetter regions that can lead to animal health problems and increased maintenance. The dry environment also aids in manure management, reducing odor and fly issues. Infrastructure and location provide logistical efficiencies. Situated along major routes like US Highway 34 and Nebraska Highway 61, with 41.56 miles of main Burlington Northern Santa Fe rail lines, the county facilitates efficient movement of cattle, feed, and finished animals. Grain elevators in Benkelman offer over 5 million bushels in capacity through coops like Farmers Co-op Association and Viterra. The site's relative isolation—fewer neighbors than alternative locations—minimizes community conflicts over noise or odors, while offering better water access and fewer road constraints.

Area feedlots utilize the close proximity of major packing plants in Colorado (Fort Morgan, Greeley), Kansas (Garden City, Dodge City), and Nebraska (Grand Island, Omaha), streamlining transport to processors and markets. Economically, cattle feeding bolsters the county's \$150 million agricultural economy (2022 USDA figures), where livestock accounts for 52% of product sales (\$78 million) and cattle/calves number 62,741 head. wages, sales, and local spending. In summary, Dundy County's blend of irrigated corn abundance, arid climate, robust transportation, and forward-thinking environmental designs makes it an exemplary hub for cattle feeding. As Nebraska's beef industry thrives on favorable margins from low feed costs and high cattle prices, this southwest region is poised for continued growth in sustainable, high-capacity operations