



## The Remarkable Ruminant

### Cattle Digestion

Along with animals such as goats, sheep, buffalo, deer, elk, giraffes, and camels, cattle have a four compartment stomach. The function of these four compartments allow cattle to physically and chemically digest food that cannot be utilized by humans or animals that only have a simple stomach with one compartment (monogastrics).

The **ruminant** digestive system of cattle helps us use feed resources that would otherwise be discarded as waste. These waste products are known as **byproducts** or incidental products created by the manufacture of something else. An example is a potato peel. French fries are consumed regularly across our country. What happens to all the potato peels? The *Ore-Ida French Fry* processing plants in Oregon and Idaho send their potato peels to be consumed by cattle in feedlots. The cattle eat the potato peels and convert a waste product into beef, a food rich in zinc, iron, and protein. In summary, humans cannot digest most what cattle eat. They turn something of little value to humans (like grass) into highly nutritious beef.



When properly managed, cattle can also improve the quality and health of the rangelands where they live and graze. Typically, rangelands are located in areas that are too rocky, steep, or otherwise inefficient for growing human food crops. Keeping this land in grass prevents soil erosion. Cattle also provide natural fertilizer for the land in the form of manure.