Cow Country Reporter

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News from your CEO

The month of September is the month when the harvesting of corn and rice were completed (end of Aug.), soybean harvest will finish (weather permitting), cotton will be near completion and the bulk of our calves will be marketed by month's end.

In addition to being completed, if you have not paid your CPL dues, please do so by the end of September because the computer will drop your name from the membership list. Thank you to the ones who have already paid. If you have any questions please contact me at 225-335-3345.

Did you know on average per USDA, the average cow herd in the U.S. is around 44 head, with an estimated 647,000 beef cattle operations in the U.S. with 88% of these farms running less than 100 mama cows? Think about this statistic for a while. Throughout the first half of the year, beef carcasses from fed cattle have been heavier due to feedlots increasing the number of days on feed. This has helped to offset the decline in cull cow slaughter, making 2024 beef production for cost higher than expected. However, beef production is still expected to decline by 4.5% in 2025 due to limited supplies. Beef cow slaughter in June was down 26% year-over-year. Due to the decline in the number of beef cows being culled, prices for cull cows have increased on average by almost 29% since Jan. 1, 2024, by 30% since July of 2023 and 91% since July 2022. So now is the time to study on a plan for next years calf crop and also may be a time to have some CPL Information meetings. Something to think about!

Dave Foster, CEO

Feedlot Inventories Unchanged from Last Year

By: Derrell S. Peel, Oklahoma State University Extension Livestock Marketing Specialist

The latest USDA Cattle on Feed report pegged August 1 feedlot inventories at 11.1 million head, unchanged from one year ago. Because of the strong seasonal variation in feedlot inventories, a twelve-month moving average of feedlot inventories is the best means to see the actual trend in feedlot production. The moving average total of feedlot inventories peaked cyclically in September 2022 at 11.887 million head before declining to 11.548 million head in September 2023. Total feedlot placements have decreased by 1.3 percent in the last twelve months compared to the previous twelve-month period. However, in the last year, average feedlot inventories have increased to 11.636 million head. Feedlot inventories have risen countercyclically due to continued feeding of heifers and increased days on feed. Feedlots have slowed the feedlot turnover rate enough to keep average monthly inventories higher despite fewer cattle entering feedlots.

Feedlot placements in July were 105.8 percent of last year. The placement total was slightly higher than the average trade estimate. July marketings were 107.7 percent of one year ago, close to expectations. July 2024 was unusual with two extra business days in the month, meaning that daily average feedlot marketings were actually down by 2.1 percent year over year.

Current feedlot inventories mask the continued decline in feeder cattle in the U.S. Figure 1 shows the U.S. calf crop from 2008 to 2023 with a projected 2024 calf crop of 33.1 million head. At that level, the total calf crop is down 3.22 million head from the 2018 cyclical peak. The projected 2024 calf crop is the smallest total U.S. calf crop since about 1941 (based on estimated calf crop prior to 1960). This calf crop figure includes beef and dairy so straight-bred dairy as well as beef on dairy crossbred calves are included in this total calf crop.

In the first 32 weeks of the year, total steer and heifer slaughter was down 1.3 percent year over year, with steer slaughter down 0.9 percent and heifer slaughter down 1.9 percent compared to last year. With yearling carcass weights up sharply year over year (steers up 23.1 pounds and heifers up 18.6 pounds), fed beef production for the year to date is up 1.1 percent over last year. By contrast, nonfed beef production is down 13.0 percent thus far in 2024 led by a total cow slaughter decrease of 15.3 percent year over year. Beef cow slaughter

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Feedlot Inventories Unchanged from Last Year

is down 15.9 percent and dairy cow slaughter is down 14.6 percent year over year, along with a 7.4 percent year over year decrease in bull slaughter. Cow carcass weights are up 10.7 pounds year over year and bull carcass weights are up 28.8 pounds year over year. Total beef production is down 1.4 percent thus far in 2024 compared to last year. At the current rate, total beef production for the year may be down two percent or less from last year, substantially less than earlier expectations of a four to five percent year over year decrease in beef production.

Derrell Peel, OSU Extension livestock marketing specialist, explains why heifer retention could tighten up the market on SunUpTV from August 24, 2024. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PaSA6uBmBLg

The Full Picture of Cow Efficiency

By: Beef Improvement Federation, Lauren Gatz, Beef Improvement Federation intern

"Improving production or output is important, but in most publications, controlling costs trumps increasing output." said Dave Lalman, Oklahoma State University. In commercial cow-calf operations, cow cost accounts for about 60 to 65% of the variation in profitability whereas increasing production (number of calves and calf weaning weight) accounts for about 35 to 40% of the variation in profitability. Lalman was a featured speaker during the 2024 Beef Improvement Federation (BIF) Symposium June 11 in Knoxville, Tenn.

Lalman's presentation emphasized that efficiency in cow-calf operations goes beyond just boosting production; it's about maximizing the return on every dollar invested and ensuring that resources are used as effectively as possible.

Economical forage production combined with efficient and timely forage harvest (grazing) generally represents the lowest hanging fruit to improve whole-ranch profitability and efficiency. "Building a better cow might be viewed as getting better at something beef cattle do well already," he explained. "Harvesting sunlight, carbon dioxide, and water to produce a delicious, nutritious human food source."

The industry has applied aggressive selection pressure to increase post-weaning growth and carcass weight. This selection pressure has led to an increase in mature cow weight. "In fact, over a 30-year career, assuming a ranch manager used herd sires representing only industry average growth and carcass weight, the operation's cows would weigh about 230 pounds more today. That increase in mature cow body weight relates to about a 13% reduction in stocking capacity to apply the same grazing pressure on a given land base," he said.

Today, several breed associations produce and publish mature cow weight expected progeny differences (EPDs). This selection tool can be used to control mature cow size and indirectly, stocking capacity on the ranch.

Lalman provided data indicating a moderate, positive phenotypic correlation between forage diet intake and a concentrate-based diet intake over several experiments. Surprisingly, in these same studies, there was no relationship between forage diet weight gain and concentrate diet weight gain. He summarized these studies by suggesting that feed intake EPDs provided by breed associations may work reasonably well to control feed intake in the cow herd. Secondly, he suggested that weight gain based on high-quality concentrate diets may not reflect the ability of cattle to thrive in a forage environment, especially a low-quality forage environment.

Lalman shared data from 353 proven Angus sires (above 0.5 accuracy for feed intake and mature cow weight EPD). From this data he demonstrated that there are numerous proven Angus sires that are expected to produce females with above average mature cow weight but below average feed intake. He also pointed out a few sires with below breed average mature cow weight and above breed average feed intake. "Mature cow weight is a good place to start to control feed intake in the cow herd, but mature weight is an indicator trait. It is a proxy used to produce an estimate of feed intake and it isn't always an accurate estimate of an animal's genetic capacity. Similarly, we have demonstrated that the feed intake EPD should work reasonably well for a cow consuming forage. Perhaps we should be using these two traits in combination to identify cows that have modest appetite but are highly productive".

Lalman also shared data generated over the past few years in their research program at Oklahoma State University related to the influence of milk yield on feed intake. In general, their group has found that beef cows' forage intake is more sensitive to milk yield than previously thought and previously published by the National Academy of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine's Nutrient Requirements of Beef Cattle. "Our data suggests that each one-pound increase in milk yield is associated with about 0.4 pounds increase in feed intake. The previously published coefficient was half that at 0.2," he said.

Lalman's presentation provided a comprehensive overview of cow efficiency, emphasizing that building better cows isn't just about boosting production — it's about creating a balanced, cost-effective, and sustainable operation. By focusing on cost control, thoughtful genetic selection, and efficient feed use, cattle producers can improve the overall efficiency of their operations, ultimately leading to greater profitability and long-term success.

Balancing Quality and Cost When Feeding Your Cow Herd

By: Shaye Koester-Wanner

Wouldn't it be nice if we could graze 365 days out of the year? Think about the feed, fuel, time and overall money you would save! While it's a great goal to aim for, it simply isn't realistic for all climates or ranches. If you fall into the category of cattlemen and women who simply must supplement feed at some point during the year, understanding the quality of your feed and how to reduce feed waste is vital to your success each year. Dr. Karl Hoppe, Livestock Systems Specialist at the Carrington Research Extension Center, offers insight into how cattle producers can better understand the nutritional requirements of their cows and how to pair that with the quality of feed they have available during Season 7, Episode 35 of the Casual Cattle Conversations podcast.

Body condition scoring is a common method of evaluating if your cows' nutritional needs are being met. To use this information effectively, ranchers must know how long it takes to move their cows up a score if they are thinner than desired.

"When it comes to winter feeding, you need to think six months ahead," Hoppe says.

Depending on the cow, there is approximately a 80-pound difference from one body condition score to the next. How long it will take you to make that gain depends on the genetics of your herd and a variety of environmental factors one being feed quality. To set your herd up for optimal performance, you must know what they need for nutrients and what our feed sources have to offer.

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Balancing Quality and Cost When Feeding Your Cow Herd *(continued)*

"People often think if cows are thin, they can just throw a few extra bales out for them," Hoppe says. "This happens during cold, wintry days too. But the cows need energy, not just extra feed. We tend to miss this and don't realize how much energy our cows need."

The solution is simple, test your hay each year.

As soon as your hay is put up, you can test it and get results back within a few days. It is encouraged to test for energy, protein, calcium, phosphorus and trace minerals. However, it can be beneficial to test for toxins such as nitrates which are more common during dry years.

When it comes to collecting samples, Karl says, "Make sure you get at least a quart bag full of corings for an adequate sample."

Additionally, it is wise to test bales from each field because there can be large variances between different types of hay and the land it was grown on. For those who grind and mix different quality hay, test before you grind as the ground hay pile isn't mixed enough to offer a representative sample. If you don't have a probe to collect samples, reach out to your extension agent, feed store or feed company representative for help. If you need to test feed that is supposed to be ensiled, be sure to allow this process to take place before collecting samples. For distillers, ask the plant or location you are purchasing from if they have averages for quality so you can formulate an accurate ration. Feed and hay samples can be sent to commercial laboratories that run these tests often. The National Forage Testing Lab website is a good resource for cattle producers to find a lab near them.

Testing the feed is one thing. Raising high-quality, cost-effective feed is another. We tend to do a lot of things like generations before us, but our cows and economy are not the same. This makes it important to explore different options and be flexible with our environment and weather to raise cost-effective, high-quality feed. This might look like grazing or haying different feeds like rye, barley, winter wheat, sorghum-sudan mixes, oats, forage sorghum or corn silage. From an energy standpoint, corn silage is a great feed source to include in your total mixed ration (TMR), which can also be cost-effective. Your location may also provide access to different byproducts such as wheat middlings, soy hulls, beet pulp or corn gluten-feed just to name a few examples. Hoppe helps North Dakota producers incorporate these into their rations.

You can raise it. You can test it. How do you make sure you don't waste it?

There are numerous strategies to reduce feed waste depending on what and how you are delivering this feed. For those feeding a TMR, feed bunks are the best option to reduce waste. For round bales, look at different feeders to help keep the hay in the feeder and not on the ground. Karl reminds producers, "Cattle don't waste high quality hay. Cattle do waste poor quality hay." So, take this into consideration when deciding how and what to feed your herd. There are opportunity costs to consider when deciding to feed a TMR or stick to bales. Hoppe said, "It costs money to grind hay, run two tractors and own a mixer wagon; so if you own a small amount of cows it might be cheaper to let cows waste a greater percentage of hay rather than feed a TMR. But, don't forget to consider the cost of that hay that is now considered bedding. Your hay could be $100/ton which is expensive bedding compared to $40/ton straw or stover." Before you get into the argument of which option is best for you, be sure to know your costs to get the most accurate picture.

As we work toward increasing our grazing days and decreasing our feeding days, remember there is no one-size-fits-all approach. Start by knowing your costs, what resources you have available, the needs of your cows and your goals. From there, don't be afraid to ask around and try new methods to determine which feeding strategies best fit your operation. And of course, TEST YOUR HAY!

Understanding Forage Quality Analysis

Knowing the nutrients contents of hay goes a long way in managing livestock performance.

By: Brian Freking - Oklahoma State Extension

Ruminant animals are naturally meant to consume a diet based on forage or roughage. Pasture and hay should usually make up most of the diet. When purchasing hay, many people may utilize visual quality such as greenness, free of weeds, more leaves than stems but we should strive to know the nutrient content.

The following report has been run for a basic analysis which provides protein and moisture, acid detergent fiber (ADF), total digestible nutrients (TDN), Net Energy for maintenance, lactation, and gain. Once moisture content is determined, we only want to focus on the Dry Basis column for accurate nutrient comparisons.

Moisture %: the ideal moisture for hay will range from 10% to 20% with approximately 15% being ideal. Moisture above 20% can lead to risk of mold formation and potential for spontaneous combustion.

Crude Protein (CP) is usually what most people look at when evaluating a feed ingredient. Total nitrogen is the fraction of the plant including true protein and non-protein nitrogen. Crude Protein in forages is simply calculated by multiplying total nitrogen by 6.25.

Acid Detergent Fiber (ADF,%) is a sub-fraction of Neutral Detergent Fiber (NDF,%) which was not run on this report. NDF is the whole fibrous fraction (cellulose, hemicellulose, and lignin) plus small amount of silica and minerals that constitute most of the plant cell wall. ADF is composed of cellulose, lignin and a minor amount of silica and minerals. Both ADF and NDF give us an idea of the amount of fiber. The more mature the plant becomes, the higher the amount of fiber it will contain. We refer to these values as being negatively correlated. The higher the ADF value the less digestible the forage will be broken down in the digestive tract. The higher the NDF value is negatively correlated with forage intake, so the higher the number, intake will be reduced.

Total Digestible Nutrients (TDN,%) is a simple measure of energy consumption expressed as a fraction and is calculated from ADF. TDN tends to overestimate the energy value of roughages compared to concentrates (grains). It still is a good measure of performance predictability based on its value.

The California Net Energy System provides improved predictability of productive response of animals, depending on whether feed energy is being used for maintenance (NEm), growth (NEg) or lactation (NEl). Since this system is more complicated most people rely more on the TDN value.

In summary, high-quality forage is the end product of good growing conditions, correct harvest timing and proper handling and storage from harvesting to utilization. Knowing the nutrient contents goes a long way in managing the performance of livestock. Please, get that hay tested!

Beef Industry Loses Long-Time Journalist Greg Henderson

By: Farm Journal

It is with great sadness that we share the unexpected passing of Drovers editorial director Greg Henderson on Aug. 16, 2024. Greg leaves behind a legacy in agricultural media and significant contributions to the advancement of beef production during his 40 years of dedication and service to the beef industry.

An award-winning journalist and revered voice for the beef industry, Greg provided timely information and in-depth analysis on all segments of the business, including cattle feeding margins, market trends, genetic advancements, emerging technologies and the impacts of economic factors on beef prices and production. His years of knowledge and expertise allowed him to serve as a moderator and speaker on many local, regional and national stages representing the interests of U.S. cattle producers.

Greg was instrumental in starting the Agricultural Media Summit in 1999. He served as president of the Livestock Publications Council (LPC) from 2000 to 2001. In 2002, he was honored with the organization's Ed Bible Distinguished Service Award and was inducted into the LPC Hall of Fame in 2008. His writing was recognized for its excellence by LPC and other industry organizations. Greg was raised on a ranch in the southern Flint Hills of Kansas and attended Kansas State University.

"There has been no other voice in the beef industry that is more respected or more trusted than Greg Henderson," said Charlene Finck, President, Industry Relations for Farm Journal. "I had the honor of working with him in a time that brought dramatic and positive change to the beef industry. Greg was a catalyst for that change and helped producers understand why it was needed through the content he created every day. I was lucky to call him a close friend. He will be missed by many."

An Advocate for the Industry

Greg worked as a writer and editor for Drovers for the better part of 40 years, providing in-depth industry analysis and covering all aspects of beef production. He was also an advocate for the industry by leading and participating in panel discussions with experts to address tough issues and helping farmers and ranchers understand current trends and challenges. An example of his leadership was the 2023 Drovers State of the Beef Industry Report, which Greg helped develop and shared with beef industry audiences.

"I loved working with Greg," said Chip Flory, host of "AgriTalk" and long-time coworker and friend. "He loved what he did. He was passionate about beef and feedyards, about cow-calf ranches and backgrounders. He loved them all. He loved the business of producing beef and respected everyone in it. The industry is going to miss his reason and his curiosity."

Despite the tremendous loss of his talents and leadership, Farm Journal's content team will ensure Drovers magazine, Drovers daily newsletter and beef industry news and information on AgWeb and other Farm Journal platforms will continue to live up to the standards Greg set.

"Greg's service to his colleagues, his dedication and the humility with which he carried himself were hallmarks of his career at Farm Journal and earlier at Vance," shared CEO Prescott Shibles. "After 40 years, the absence of his steady leadership is felt throughout our organization."

Greg is survived by his wife, Ruth, of the home in Olathe, Kan.; children Lisa (Greg) Suellentrop and Jared Henderson; grandchildren Charlie and Amelia Suellentrop; and brother Gary Henderson (Kathy) of Havana, Kan. Greg was preceded in death by his parents QC and Marie Henderson of Niotaze, Kan., and his sister Glenda (Henderson) McDonald. Memorial services will be held at a future date.

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