Click here to subscribe

UNIVERSITY OF GEORGIA
EXTENSION

Will Secor, Ph.D.
Assistant Professor & Extension Livestock Economist
Masters of Agribusiness (MAB) Coordinator
Department of Agricultural & Applied Economics
University of Georgia

Cattle Slaughter and Beef Production Check-In

Cattle slaughter through the end of February 2025 has been lower than last year. This is not a surprise given the tighter inventories that were expected. However, two interesting developments have emerged. First, the distribution of the cattle being processed is shifting. And second, beef production is a bit higher than last year despite this smaller slaughter figure.

Through March 8, the USDA estimated that 5.75 million head of cattle were slaughtered. This is about 3 percent below the same timeframe last year. Steers have increased the share of slaughter to around 49.5 percent of total slaughter (an increase of about 2 percentage points compared to 2024). Steer slaughter is about the same as last year at

2.28 million head. The cow slaughter share has dropped by around 2 percentage points to 17.6 percent of total cattle slaughtered.

Cow slaughter has plummeted in 2025. Cumulative slaughter figures through February 22 suggest that all cow slaughter has fallen by 15 percent year-over-year. Beef cow slaughter has declined further to 22 percent below cumulative slaughter totals through the same time last year. At the current rate, about 9 percent of the beef cow inventory may be slaughtered in 2025.

Heifer slaughter has also fallen slightly in 2025. The USDA estimated that heifer slaughter through the beginning of the year so far was around 1.46 million head. This is about 1.7 percent below last year's estimate of 1.49 million head. Notably this decline is outpaced by the decline in cow slaughter.

In contrast to these declines, beef production increased slightly in 2025. Through the first week of March, approximately 5.02 billion pounds of beef were produced. This compares to around 4.96 billion pounds of beef produced during the same time last year. This represents a 1.3 percent increase this year compared to 2024.

The beef production increase is due to higher cattle carcass weights. USDA data suggest that cattle dressed weights averaged 876 pounds last week. This was 4 percent higher year-over-year. Dressed weights have averaged between 3 and 5 percent heavier than last year. This continues last year's significant increase in dressed weights compared to 2023 and 5-year averages.

Combined, these slaughter and beef production trends appear to be a continuation of last year's trends. This is not entirely surprising given the feed cost and inventory situation. In the months ahead, beef cow slaughter will need to be watched for any signs of change. This is one leading indicator for cattle herd re-building. Additionally, should these higher dressed weights continue, the USDA may need to revise beef production estimates higher this year. This (or other revisions) may have an impact on cattle markets this year.

The Markets

Cattle markets were mixed across weight categories last week. Fed cattle markets moved up a little over 1 percent last week. Lighter weight calf prices also moved higher around 1-2 percent. Heavier weight feeder cattle prices traded sideways to lower for many markets. All markets were up compared to last year. The USDA releases its monthly WASDE report tomorrow which may move markets this week.

		Week of 3/7/25	Week of 2/28/25	Week of 3/8/24
5-Area Fed Steer	all grades, live weight, $/cwt	$200.28	$197.65	$185.12
	all grades, dressed weight, $/cwt	$316.43	$312.92	$293.39
Boxed Beef	Choice Value, 600-900 lb., $/cwt	$314.07	$312.79	$305.93
	Choice-Select Spread, $/cwt	$10.42	$9.69	$10.17
700-800 lb. Feeder Steer	Montana 3-market, $/cwt	$290.69	$294.43	$262.63
	Nebraska 7-market, $/cwt	$299.01	$298.93	$269.94
	Oklahoma 8-market, $/cwt	$279.66	$285.11	$257.81
500-600 lb. Feeder Steer	Montana 3-market, $/cwt	$369.35	$364.02	$340.79
	Nebraska 7-market, $/cwt	$374.26	$370.42	$335.34
	Oklahoma 8-market, $/cwt	$357.26	$350.93	$318.42
Feed Grains	Corn, Omaha, NE, $/bu (Thursday)	$4.44	$4.55	$4.42
	DDGS, Nebraska, $/ton	$161.50	$165.71	$190.29

Data Source: USDA-AMS Market News as compiled by LMIC

Click here to subscribe

Contributing Universities

Disclaimer: The information provided in this newsletter is intended for educational purposes only. LMIC will not be held liable for any decisions made based on the information contained in this publication.