



IN THE CATTLE MARKETS



July 6, 2026

[Click here to subscribe](#)



Charley Martinez, Ph.D.

Assistant Professor and Director

Department of Agricultural & Resource Economics

University of Tennessee

How Big Will Cattle Get This Year?

Through the first half of the year, year -to- date cattle slaughter is 8.7% lower than last year, and placements have been higher this year compared to last year. These two stats provide information about current and future beef production. Another insightful/helpful stat is dressed weight. As supplies have become lower in the last 2 years, dressed weights have increased to help offset the lower slaughter amounts. Weights have increased so much; in March we hit a record average dressed weight of 902 pounds across all cattle. But, as we get into the dog days of summer, we can expect annual lows and then an increase the rest of the year, but how high will dressed weights go?

Figure 1 displays the monthly dressed averages for the previous 5 years (2020-2024), 2025, and 2026. The increased weight pattern in dressed cattle weights remains obvious in 2026, but weights are running well above both the 2020–2024 average and 2025 levels. The five-year average (2020–2024) declined from about 833 pounds in January to a seasonal low of approximately 812 pounds in June, before recovering to approximately 838–839 pounds in November and December. In contrast, 2025 started near 877 pounds in January, slipped to a low of about 865 pounds in June, and then increased steadily through the second half of the year to roughly 895 pounds in December. The 2026 series begin at approximately 896 pounds in January, reached an early peak near 902 pounds in March, and remains near 899 pounds through May. Thus, 2026 weights are currently running about 20–30 pounds heavier than 2025 and roughly 65–85 pounds above the 2020–2024 average during the same months. If the 2026 vs 2025 difference holds, we could see 915-925 average dressed weights at the end of the year.

From a market perspective, these exceptionally heavy carcass weights continue to partially offset the effects of historically tight cattle supplies. With the U.S. cattle inventory remaining constrained, feeders appear to be adding weight to available marketings, likely reflecting strong feeding margins, improved feeding performance, and incentives to maximize beef output per head. The weights also highlight the continued economic value of efficient weight gain, although sustained record-heavy carcasses could eventually pressure grading performance, feeding costs, and optimal market timing if carcass discounts emerge. Overall, the 2026 data indicate that carcass weights remain a key mechanism through which the industry is adapting to the current low-inventory cattle cycle.

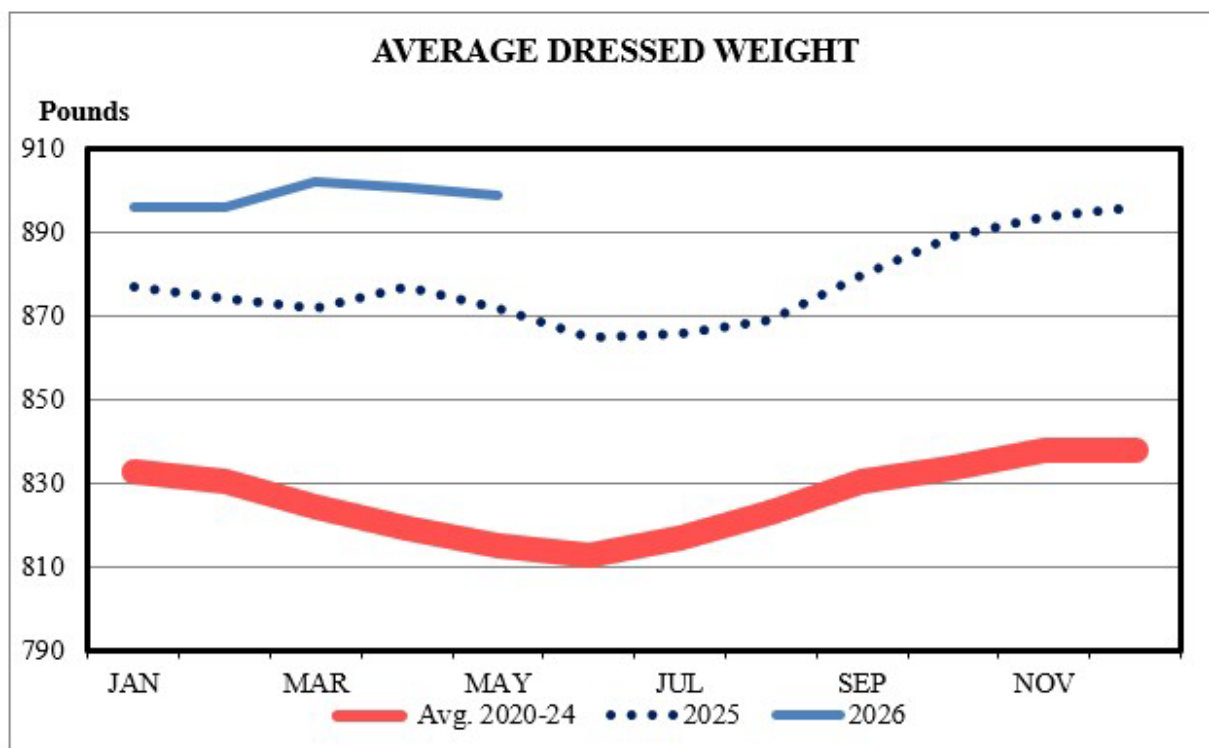


Figure 1. Monthly Average Dressed Weights (Cattle), Federally Inspected

The Markets

		Week of 7/3/26	Week of 6/26/26	Week of 7/4/25
5-Area Fed Steer	all grades, live weight, \$/cwt	\$255.12	\$259.34	\$229.43
	all grades, dressed weight, \$/cwt	\$402.47	\$407.75	\$369.30
Boxed Beef	Choice Value, 600-900 lb., \$/cwt	\$390.73	\$396.53	\$393.94
	Choice-Select Spread, \$/cwt	\$19.99	\$20.31	\$13.21
700-800 lb. Feeder Steer	Montana 3-market, \$/cwt	--	\$392.41	--
	Nebraska 7-market, \$/cwt	\$407.76	\$438.01	--
	Oklahoma 8-market, \$/cwt	\$385.57	\$390.38	\$320.77
500-600 lb. Feeder Steer	Montana 3-market, \$/cwt	--	\$506.93	--
	Nebraska 7-market, \$/cwt	\$509.80	\$521.49	\$441.00
	Oklahoma 8-market, \$/cwt	\$480.74	\$487.76	\$384.24
Feed Grains	Corn, Omaha, NE, \$/bu (Thursday)	\$4.17	\$4.15	\$4.35
	DDGS, Nebraska, \$/ton	\$155.43	\$155.14	--

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

[Click here to subscribe](#)

Contributing Organizations



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.