

Livestock Monitor

A Newsletter for Extension Staff

Livestock Marketing Information Center

State Extension Services in Cooperation with the USDA

Market Indicators . . .

May 22, 2026

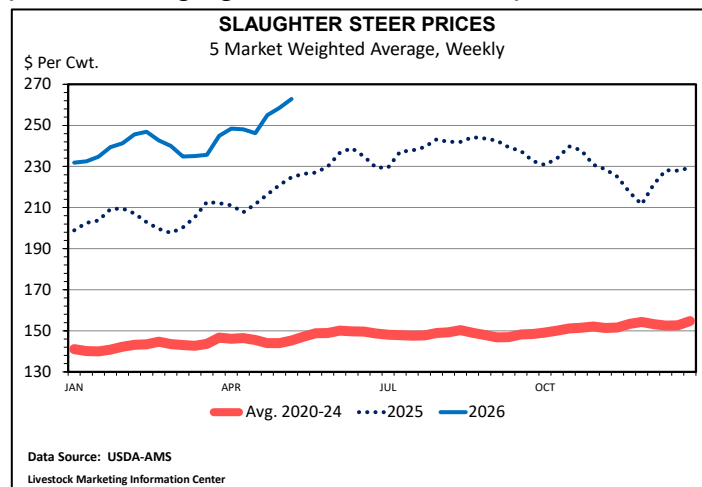
Production			Prices			
Week Ending 5/23/2026	Last	Year Ago	Weekly Average (\$/Cwt)	Last	Week Ago	Year Ago
FI Cattle Slaughter (Thou Hd)	528	576	Live Steer	262.77	262.85	226.97
FI Hog Slaughter (Thou Hd)	2321	2356	Dressed Steer	411.07	411.07	361.74
FI Sheep Slaughter (Thou Hd)	33	39	Choice Beef Cutout	392.65	389.47	359.13
Young Chicken Sitr. (Mil Hd)	170.7	168.7	USDA Hide/Offal	14.73	14.35	11.08
Slaughter Cattle Live Weight	1469	1423	OK City Fdr. Str. (6-7 Cwt.)	419.76	425.51	337.28
Slaughter Hog Live Weight	293	288	National Negotiated Hogs	94.39	94.70	94.46
Slaughter Lamb/Sheep Live Wt.	116	128	Natl. Net Hog Carcass	92.18	90.85	93.20
Beef Production (Mil Pounds)	474.4	501.5	Feeder Pigs (40 Lbs) (\$/Head)	105.59	109.46	80.32
Pork Production (Mil Pounds)	507.0	506.0	Pork Cutout	96.52	96.53	100.68
Lamb, Mutton Prod. (Mil Lbs.)	2.0	2.6	Lamb Cutout	612.35	603.20	460.32
Previous 6 Wk. Moving Avg.			Cheddar, 40 lb Block(\$/lb)	1.67	1.66	1.81
Total Beef (Mil Lbs)	473.1	493.8	Corn, Omaha (\$/Bu)	4.46	4.51	4.62
Total Pork (Mil Lbs)	527.3	519.9	Soybeans, Cntrl IL (\$/Bu)	12.02	12.02	10.76
Total Lamb, Mutton (Mil Lbs)	2.1	2.4				

Source: Various USDA-AMS reports. Data are preliminary.

Trends...CATTLE PRICES AND CATTLE ON FEED

The weekly 5-area fed steer price continues to track seasonally higher ahead of the Memorial Day holiday weekend. Last week, fed steer prices were tracking in the low-to-mid \$260 per cwt area, well above year-ago levels. Since the start of the year, the fed steer price has risen from \$231.86 per cwt to last week's price of \$262.85 per cwt, an increase of \$30 per cwt (+13%) in just under five months. Over the same period, weekly fed steer prices have been tracking above year-ago levels by about \$35 per cwt (+17%) on average. Last year, the fed steer price reached a peak of \$244.25 per cwt in late August. From the Memorial Day holiday to the peak in late August, the fed steer price increased about \$17 per cwt (+8%). If the fed steer price follows a similar seasonal pattern to last year, weekly prices could continue to move higher, assuming demand holds strong.

In the southern plains, weekly steer calf prices (400-500 lbs.) have been averaging \$555 per cwt, ranging from \$522 to \$582 per cwt since the start of the year. Prices for 500-600 lbs.



steer calves have been holding steady since the start of the year within a range of \$469 to \$512 per cwt, averaging \$493 per cwt. Feeder steer prices have been trending sideways since the start of the year with prices ranging from \$370 to \$395 per cwt and a weekly average of \$384 per cwt. Seasonally, steer calf and feeder steer prices trend higher through the first half of the year and typically reach a peak during the second half of the year.

The May 1 Cattle on Feed report from USDA-NASS was released last week. The

number of cattle on feed as of May 1 was up +1.8% to 11.6 million head. This was within the range of pre-report estimates, which were expecting an average increase of +1.4% in cattle on feed with analysts expecting increases to range from +0.2% to +2.4%. Fed cattle marketings in April were 1.6 million head, down -9.5% from last year. Analysts were expecting a decline of -9.5% on average in fed cattle marketings with estimates ranging from down -10.3% to -8.3%. April placements increased +5.5% from last year to 1.7 million head. There were a wide range of pre-report estimates with some analysts expecting placements to decline about -4% while others expected an increase of more than +8% with an average of up +3% from last year. Overall, the report was aligned with pre-report estimates and continues to signal that cattle supplies remain tight.

FOOD SECTOR RETAIL SALES GROWTH LIMPS INTO SPRING QUARTER

Retail sales across the entire economy have been resilient through the first four months of the year, but food sector sales beginning in March have been advancing at a slower pace than was seen since the pandemic. Economy-wide, retail sales were up close to +5% from a year ago in March and April. This followed a slow start in January with only a +3% increase. Grocery store sales started out the year at a +2% growth pace and then slipped to a decline from the prior February but have moved back into positive ground, barely, for March and April. This is the slowest four-month growth pace for grocery stores since late 2023 and into early 2024.

Foodservice markets have seen bigger adjustments in sales growth than grocery stores so far this year. Foodservice and drinking place sales held close to +5% gains from a year earlier in January and February. Sales in March dipped to a +1.5% gain, and the advance (preliminary) reading for April showed a +3% gain from April 2025. This compares to the annual gains in 2024 and 2025 that were up at a +5% pace. Breaking out the components of the foodservice sector, restaurant sales trends in the first three months of 2026 showed about the same growth figures as the entire foodservice sector, although the dip from February to March was slightly more pronounced as institutional foodservice was steadier. Limited-service restaurants (fast food, etc.) sales, which posted a +3% percent gain in 2025 following a +5% gain in 2024, maintained a +3% gain in January and February. March growth fell to a +0.5% increase from a year earlier.

Full-service restaurant sales have been the highlight of the food economy in the last several years. Full-service restaurant sales were up +8% in 2025 from 2024, following a +6% gain in 2024 from 2023. Year-over-year sales gains from May to August last year averaged +10%, which probably played a role in the strong demand for beef seen during those months. January and February full-service restaurant sales this year topped a year earlier by +7%. The March sales tally was only up +2%, one of the bigger month-to-month slowdowns in the last few years.

PROFITABILITY REMAINS FOR THE HOG SECTOR

Over the last two years, Iowa State University's estimated monthly returns for a farrow-to-finish hog operation have posted profitable levels. During the two-year period, estimated returns have ranged from \$2.67 to \$52.58 per head with an average of \$20.15 per head. During the four months of reported data for this year, monthly returns have averaged \$16.19 per head with a range of \$7.18 per head in January to \$21.54 per head in March. Iowa State University reported April's estimated returns at \$20.43 per head, an increase of \$6.95 per head (+52%) from last year.

The increase in returns from a year ago was driven partly by lower total feed costs to \$86.36 per head, a decline of \$1.52 per head (-2%) from last year. The May WASDE from USDA was forecasting prices for corn and soybean meal to be in the low \$4 per bushel and low \$300 per ton area. This should keep feed costs lower in the near term and support hog returns.

The reported selling price was \$90.91 per cwt in April, down slightly from \$91.07 per cwt in March but up \$3.32 per cwt (+25%) from the prior year. The strong selling price has supported profitability for producers and continues to track above the breakeven selling price, which was \$84.54 per cwt in April. A year ago, the breakeven selling price was \$83.91 per cwt. Assuming feed costs remain steady, returns will likely continue to be supported by strong hog prices in the near term. The Livestock Marketing Information Center (LMIC) is forecasting hog prices (national weighted average base carcass) to trend seasonally higher towards \$100 per cwt by midsummer, which is likely to support profitable levels for producers. Prices are expected to move seasonally lower during the second half of the year, which will likely tighten estimated returns.