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INSIDE WLJ

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BANK FRAUD — Nebraska farmer convicted of bank fraud asks court for sentencing reconsideration. **Page 6**

A LOOK BACK IN HISTORY

With recent developments regarding wolves in Colorado, let's look back to another year of debate surrounding wolf reintroduction. In a Jan. 13, 2003, article, Sarah L. Roen wrote, "The goal of the wolf relocation program was to increase the population of wolves to the point they could be removed from the endangered species list. As of the latest count, the wolf population in Montana, Wyoming and Idaho has exploded to over 700 animals. Those figures may be a success to some, but to ranchers who have viewed the wolf re-introduction plan as the 'rancher eradication project,' it means many more wolves to protect their livestock against."

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Adobe Stock

The Big Four have been hit with more price-fixing suits, this time by several large-scale beef purchasers.

Big Four packers faced with more antitrust suits

— Beef buyers claim conspiracy

The four biggest meat-packers have been hit with more lawsuits accusing them of price fixing, this time championed by large-scale beef purchasers.

In the U.S. District Court for

the Eastern District of New York, four lawsuits were filed against Tyson, Cargill, JBS and National Beef in late December. The suits were brought by Target, BJ's Wholesale Club, Gordon Food Service and Jetro Holdings.

The beef purchasers allege

that as early as 2015 and continuing through present time, the packers conspired to fix beef prices, violating the Sherman Act. The lawsuits contend that the packers coordinated, manipulated or agreed to pay less-than-competitive prices for fed cattle to increase or maintain their

price margins.

"Defendants and their co-conspirators implemented their conspiracy by collusively reducing the slaughter-ready cattle and beef supply, which over time artificially elevated the price of beef that they sold to Plaintiff and others," a suit alleged.

The lawsuit cited an earlier suit by cattle ranchers against the packers, which shared testimony from a confidential witness who was previously employed by Swift Beef. "Jason F." confirmed a conspiracy among the operating defendants in which they agreed to reduce their cattle

purchases and slaughter volumes to increase their margins.

"Defendants' transactional data and slaughter volume records, information published by the USDA, and Defendants' public calls for

See FIXING on page 13

Analysis: Most ESA funding given to two species

An Associated Press (AP) analysis revealed that roughly two-thirds of funding for endangered and threatened species listed on the Endangered Species Act (ESA) goes towards two fish species. In contrast, other species receive little to no funding.

The analysis was released on the 50th anniversary of the passage of the legislation. According to the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, ESA cur-

rently protects 1,662 U.S. species and 638 foreign species from threats such as habitat loss and climate change.

AP found that of the approximately \$1.2 billion allocated annually to endangered and threatened species, 67% was spent on the recovery of two fish types: salmon and steelhead trout along the West

See ESA on page 16

Missouri Prime Beef withdraws wastewater application

— Public hearing canceled

Missouri Prime Beef Packers, a beef processing plant based in Pleasant Hope, MO, has withdrawn its application to use an innovative technology to discharge wastewater into the Pomme de Terre watershed.

According to a release from the Missouri Department of Natural Resources (DNR), on Jan. 2 Missouri Prime Beef formally informed the agency about its

decision to withdraw an operating permit for the facility's discharge.

Missouri Prime Beef submitted a renewal application for its wastewater operating permit on Aug. 2, 2022, along with an antidegradation application on Nov. 17, 2022. The request sought authorization for the slaughter and processing of live cattle for wholesale, as well as the storage and discharge of wastewater and the

See MO PRIME on page 28

Severe weather halts cattle trade, slaughter

Winter storms have made their way across the country, disrupting cattle trading and slaughter. Snow has hit much of the cattle feeding regions—which is sure to impact cattle performance—along with processing plants, limiting slaughter numbers.

"There's another round of winter storms starting to develop, which will not only impact transportation and slaughter levels through the end of the week but will also move the focus away from marketing cattle and hogs and on to the overall animal health through the winter blast," DTN said in its Thursday midday comments.

Live cattle futures traded mostly sideways over the week. The February contract gained 68 cents to close at \$171.80, and the April contract gained 27 cents to close at \$174.57.

Cash trade through Thursday was very limited on account of the storms. Total cash trade is estimated at less than 15,000 head. Live steers sold from \$172-175, and dressed steers sold from \$272-275.

"It is reported that some cattle have been removed from showlists due to weather factors, as feeders feel comfortable holding cattle until next week or later at this point," DTN said.

Another round of winter storms is shifting the focus more

onto preparation and less on cattle sales, the outlet continued.

Cash trade for the week ending Jan. 7 totaled 69,516 head. Live steers averaged \$173.97, and dressed steers averaged \$274.35.

The national weekly direct beef type price distribution for the week of Jan. 1-8 was the following on a live basis:

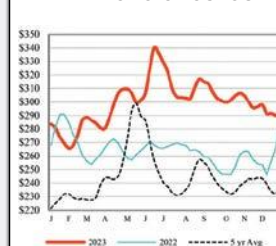
- Negotiated purchases: \$173.97.
- Formula net purchases: \$174.52.
- Forward contract net purchases: \$180.49.
- Negotiated grid net purchases: \$175.69.

On a dressed basis:
• Negotiated purchases: \$274.87.

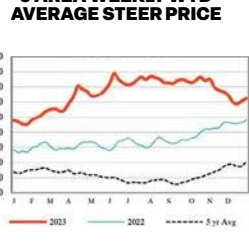
See MARKETS on page 25

Time Sensitive
Priority Handling
PERIODICAL:

WEEKLY CHOICE CUTOUT



5 AREA WEEKLY WTD AVERAGE STEER PRICE



LIVE STEERS	DRESSED STEERS	CME FEEDER
\$174.87	\$275.00	\$227.75
WEEK ENDING: 01-11-2024		

COMMENTS

Winter resilience

We are already half-way through the first month of the new year and livestock producers all over the country have been hard at it and busy starting off 2024 with a bang! There have been a variety of events that have taken place already in January with many exhibitors



MURNIN

making their way to Oklahoma City for the Cattlemen's Congress or to Denver for the National Western Stock Show. Preparations are underway for great events like the many stock shows in Texas and the famous Red Bluff Bull & Gelding Sale in California. What great events to get out to network and see the latest genetic and management advancements happening in the many different breeds. Congratulations to all the champions who have been crowned thus far and the successful sales that have taken place around these events.

Many of the major video auction companies have started the new year with their January highlight sales and demand for quality cattle seems to be great starting off the 2024 marketings. The Northern Livestock Video Auction recently held their annual Diamond Ring Sale in Billings, MT, and sold many lots of backgrounded steers and heifers. Demand was great for reputation cattle. Replacement quality heifers were also well sought after with a great premium for those heifers destined to be bred and enter the production cycle for ranchers.

We may be starting to see some ranchers trying to get back to their normal carrying capacity. I will say, I do not think we are seeing a herd expansion by any means, simply trying to get back to traditional numbers following the reduction in herds from the many different factors in recent years. Hopefully with some moisture, higher cattle prices and lower hay prices ranchers can heal up from years of marginal profits and provide more optimism for their respective operations going forward.

Despite the hot markets, Mother Nature has reminded the majority of the country that it is winter. After a very pleasant fall and start of winter, temperatures plummeted to well below zeros this past week, with actual air temperatures in my part of the world hitting 30 below zero with dangerous wind chill temperatures well below that. I commend all the livestock producers putting in the extra hours and effort to make sure their animals are fed and watered during these extreme conditions. You may not get the recognition you deserve for this work, but you are extremely appreciated.

We are busy finalizing the details for our Livestock Tour presented by *Western Livestock Journal*, which will take place May 19-25 in San Antonio, TX, and the surrounding area. Registration for the tour is now out. If you have joined us in the past, be on the lookout for the registration packet in your mail. If you would like to learn more about the tour, please visit the website wljtours.com. I am very excited about the lineup of tour stops this year and the quality of information that will be available to those that can join us in May.

We will visit a diverse set of agriculture operations ranging from one of the nation's largest seedstock providers, to a cattle-buying station that processes 1,000 head of cattle each day. We will also visit some historical cattle ranches that have shaped this country's cattle industry along with some relatively new operations making their mark in the world with some different marketing methods. Beyond the excellent cattle stops, we will also have some great tour stops centered around horses, livestock genetics, university research and much more. No trip to San Antonio would be complete without a stop by the Alamo and time for some sightseeing in that historic town. Hospitality, accommodations, food and camaraderie will be second to none; we hope you can join us! If you would like to learn more about the Livestock Tour, please feel free to call me anytime at 406-696-1502.

I would be amiss if I did not take a moment and congratulate Pete Crow and the entire Crow family on receiving the prestigious 2024 Friend of the National Western Award. The Crow family and the *Western Livestock Journal* have been stalwarts around the National Western Stock Show, with the office in the Livestock Exchange Building at the National Western Center at one time. Pete has been a huge advocate for the National Western Stock Show and has been very involved in the discussions of the revamped stock show facilities and improvements. I can think of no better or more worthy recipient of this award than the Crow family, congratulations on this well-deserved recognition! — **DEVIN MURNIN**



DITTMER'S TAKE

Private property rights are intrinsic to our Constitution, our economy and culture. Two cases before the Supreme Court of the U.S. (SCOTUS) and one new corporate stunt threaten those rights.

A California case involves local governments leveraging building permits to extort fees from property owners for political purposes unrelated to the property's use. A property owner applied for a building permit for a small home near Lake Tahoe. The county conditioned the permit on a \$23,420 "traffic mitigation fee" for costs of expanding public roads to reduce congestion. The owner sued in lower courts, claiming excessive fees.

SCOTUS' previous rulings held that permit conditions must have an "essential nexus" and be "roughly proportional" to a development's adverse impact. Their precedents held, requiring property owners to make part of their land available for public use violated the Fifth Amendment, barring government from taking property without just compensation, according to a Wall Street Journal report.

Some state courts have argued that the SCOTUS precedents don't apply to fees when local governments are doing the extorting, yet escalating fees are being used in lieu of unpopular property tax increases to fund governments.

The Journal story points out "Politicians increasingly trample property rights to promote what they deem to be the public good," like affordable housing, public art, daycare centers and ride-share programs.

Then environmental zealots have hatched a new ploy. Monster asset manager BlackRock's CEO Larry Fink is a leading proponent of the latest environmental, social and corporate governance movement. Navigator CO2 Ventures—84% BlackRock-owned, according to American Stewards of Liberty—and Summit Carbon Solutions are private companies that have "declared" themselves "common carriers." Common carriers are usually regulated railroads, water companies and pipelines. They are allowed as private companies to take privately owned land by eminent domain.

Navigator's "Heartland Greenway" plans to pipe CO2 emissions from ethanol plants to locations where it could be sequestered deeply underground. Summit would connect to over 30 ethanol plants in Nebraska, North Dakota and South Dakota, and Minnesota.

Our country needs pipelines but legally: "A 'common carrier' is a carrier owning or operating a railroad, steamship, or other transportation line or route which transports goods or merchandise for any general public," according to the Legal Information Institute, Cornell Law School.

While Navigator has paused their project, facing local resistance, South Dakota state Rep. Karla Lems (R-16) said over

INFRINGING ON PRIVATE PROPERTY RIGHTS

150 South Dakota landowners have been served papers by Summit, condemning portions of their land and allowing Summit access, The Epoch Times said.

"My biggest concern is that we are setting a precedent," Lems said. "This is eminent domain for private gain. If the pipeline succeeds, 'solar and wind are right behind them.'"

"Climate emergency" again.

To achieve "net zero" by 2050, solar and wind arrays will need huge swaths of land. But 70% of U.S. land is privately owned. Many owners are opposed. Many communities have blocked projects. So, Michigan passed a law taking control of renewable projects away from local communities, transferring to a state agency instead.

Chase CEO Jamie Dimon, has advised publicly that for clean energy, "We may even need to (invoke) eminent domain."

It may take legislation to stop private companies from declaring themselves common carriers with eminent domain powers.

The U.S. solicitor general argued a case before SCOTUS recently (*Moore v. United States*). The justices reportedly focused on whether the 16th Amendment's authorization of "income" taxes gives it the power to tax "unrealized" income. We regard it as "paper profit." The law has historically characterized income as funds the taxpayer has control over or "constructive realization."

If you haven't gotten it, you can't pay bills with it.

If SCOTUS rules for the government, it could mean that any appreciation in the value of your house, your stocks or your land could be subject to the tax collector every year, whether you sold anything and received money or not. Like the feudal king's tax collector deciding how much tribute you owe.

Notice the words "income." As in receipt, not a fanciful contrived government calculation assigning taxable responsibility. Solicitor General Elizabeth Prelogar argued that the "ordinary conception of income" means any "economic gain between two points in time."

Preposterous. It does not mean money you might think you're going to gain but may not; economic reality, not theoretical.

The Founding Fathers never intended to finance government on imaginary monies. Can you imagine telling the IRS that you paid your tax bill with imaginary gains and they should imagine you paid your taxes with it? — **Steve Dittmer, WLJ columnist**

(Steve Dittmer is the author of the *Agribusiness Freedom Foundation* newsletter. Views in the column do not necessarily represent the views or opinions of WLJ or its editorial staff.)

GUEST OPINION

TRADE MISSION OFFERS MARKET OPPORTUNITIES, FRIENDSHIPS FOR AG

I was honored to be one of six representatives of the Montana Farm Bureau Federation who traveled to Taiwan earlier in 2023 to visit with trade officials and business leaders about further opportunities for partnership. Taiwan ranks sixth in agricultural products trade with the U.S. This trade mission, led by Montana Gov. Greg Gianforte (R), included representatives of agricultural trade and several technological industries representing a growing tech industry in the state. All of these can potentially strengthen the partnership between Taiwan and Montana.

We spent much of the trip in meetings, on tours and at dinners. This included discussions with flour companies and beef importers. We were hosted by dignitaries of government, education and manufacturing. Watching old friendships rekindle and new ones taking shape was an amazing experience.

As a grain farmer, it's rewarding to see how our grain is valued in Taiwan, and it was a thrill to see firsthand what happens when grain arrives in the port. This trip made me realize how Farm Bureau leaders are critical to advancing international trade, whether it be wheat, beef, pulse crops (dry peas, dry beans, lentils and chickpeas), sugar or any of the diverse commodities we grow in our country. A trade mission that reinvigorates established trade relationships with our partners is well worth it and provides benefits to all farmers.

This trade mission materialized because our governor realized the importance of our state's continued relationship with

Taiwan. Our state Farm Bureau has an excellent relationship with our governor and his staff, which led to us becoming an integral part of planning this trip. Having a good working relationship with your governor, regardless of political party, is imperative to your organization not only on the trade front but on agricultural issues, as well.

As I previously mentioned, we had representatives from the technology sector with us. These aren't people I would normally communicate with, so it was wonderful to learn about various aspects of their businesses. Although we were separated for some of our tours and meetings, we spent enough time with the technology sector representatives to make important new contacts. Building relationships across industries, like between ag and technology as we did on this trip, also creates unique opportunities for agriculture.

We found the people of Taiwan warm and friendly, and many of them reiterated how much they love democracy and Americans. Hearing that message while you're in another country is rewarding, indeed.

I encourage other state Farm Bureaus to check into forming a trade mission. Work with your state's governmental leaders and other agricultural organizations and develop a comprehensive plan. Have international trade visitors to your farms and ranches, then visit theirs when you are in their country. A trade mission is an incredible learning experience that can lead to robust markets for your states' commodities, with the additional bonus of forming new, international friendships. — **Cyndi Johnson, president of Montana Farm Bureau**

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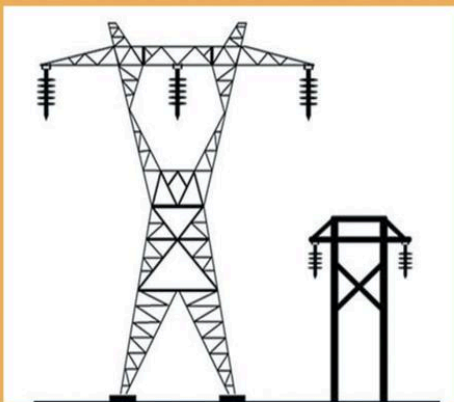
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- Can Not be Sub-Transmission Lines
- Must be Transmission Power Lines
- Must be 115 Kv to 345 Kv

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200 or more acres (must be in recent cultivation or in pasture or clear open range)

No timberland or clear cuts

State or county maintained road bordering the property

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Congressional leaders announce possible budget deal

Republican and Democratic leaders have reached a budget deal that could avert a government shutdown that likely would have included the Agriculture Department.

The agreement on what's known as "topline" budget numbers allows for \$1.66 trillion in spending, including \$886.3 billion in defense spending and \$772.7 billion in domestic discretionary spending, The Washington Post reported.

But Congress members will have to work quickly to reach an agreement before the continuing resolution that funds several agencies—including USDA—runs out on Jan. 19 if a shutdown is to be avoided.

Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer (D-NY) and House Speaker Mike Johnson (R-LA-04) jointly announced the agreement, which is not expected to win support from the most conservative House members. House Minority

Leader Hakeem Jeffries (D-NY-08) was also supportive.

Johnson also sent a letter to House members on Jan. 7 explaining the justifications for the deal as well as pointing to cuts as a way to gain support among fellow Republicans.

"While these final spending levels will not satisfy everyone, and they do not cut as much spending as many of us would like, this deal does provide us a path to: move the process forward;

reprioritize funding within the topline towards conservative objectives, instead of last year's Schumer-Pelosi omnibus; and fight for the important policy riders included in our House FY24 bills," Johnson wrote in a letter, according to a report by MSNBC.

President Joe Biden praised the agreement and urged congressional Republicans to support it.

In a statement, Biden said, "The bipartisan fund-

ing framework congressional leaders have reached moves us one step closer to preventing a needless government shutdown and protecting important national priorities. It reflects the funding levels that I negotiated with both parties and signed into law last spring."

He continued, "It rejects deep cuts to programs hardworking families count on, and provides a path to passing full-year funding bills that deliver for the American people and are free of any extreme policies. I want to thank Leaders Schumer and Jeffries for their leadership in reaching this framework. Now, congressional Republicans must do their job, stop threatening to shut down the government, and fulfill their basic responsibility to fund critical domestic and national security priorities, including my supplemental request. It's time for them to act."


The topline numbers released Jan. 7 do not spell out nuts and bolts of individual departments such as USDA. The House has failed to pass the appropriations bill for USDA/Food and Drug Administration (FDA) and other related agencies since first

attempting to vote on the bill last July. One of the biggest sticking points for the USDA/FDA bill is a provision that makes it more difficult for women to receive a prescription for the abortion pill mifepristone, which is overseen by FDA.

Schumer, on the social media platform X, posted a statement from himself and Jeffries. "We have made clear to Speaker Mike Johnson that Democrats will not support including poison pill policy changes in any of the twelve appropriations bills put before the Congress."

The House Freedom Caucus, which is a block of the most conservative members of Congress, also posted on X, calling the agreement "a total failure." The group said the spending level was higher than they would support.


Johnson won the vote to become House speaker in late October after House Republicans ousted his predecessor, Rep. Kevin McCarthy (R-20) of California, because McCarthy negotiated a short-term spending deal with Democrats to avoid a government shutdown at the end of the 2023 fiscal year last September. — **Chris Clayton, DTN ag policy editor**




44th Annual Range Cattle Sale

FRIDAY FEBRUARY 2, 2024 AT 12:30 PM MT
AT THE ELKINGTON RANCH 5080 SUNNYSIDE RD. IDAHO FALLS, ID 83406

75 Hereford Bulls, 20 South Devon Bulls Red & Black 15 Bred Heifers




428K EPHR ELKER PATHFINDER 428K P4436997
Birthdate 4/9/2022
Dame has a perfect udder
Lots of pigment
PAP 33 BW 75 lbs




385K EPHR ELKER PATH 266D (385K) P44369992
Birthdate 4/1/2022
Moderate bull
Dark and pigmented
Heifer Bull
PAP 35 BW 76lbs


All bulls are raised on the range by their own Dams, no ET and no nurse cows. We produce bulls like the commercial cattleman for the commercial cattleman.



275K EPHR ELKER WARRIOR 275K (P44370287)
Birthdate 3/4/2022
Thick and Massive
A Heifer Bull
PAP 40 BW 70



295K EPHR ELKER PATHFINDER 295K (P44370237)
Birthdate 3/5/2022
Deep and Muscular
A Heifer Bull
PAP 33 BW 75



410K EBS ELKER EXTREEM 410K (221342)
Birthdate 3/24/2022
Red South Devon bull
Strong and sound bull
PAP 41 BW 77 lbs

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Asia headwinds persist for beef exports

U.S. beef exports slowed in November, recording the third lowest value of 2023, according to data released by USDA and compiled by the U.S. Meat Export Federation (USMEF). November lamb exports also trended lower.

Beef exports totaled 99,029 metric tons (mt) in November, down 14% from a year ago and the second lowest of the year, while value fell 7% to \$786.2 million. For the first 11 months of the year, beef exports were 13% below the record pace of 2022 at 1.18 million mt, while value declined 17% to \$9.11 billion.

Beef exports increased year-over-year to Mexico, Central America, the Dominican Republic and Hong Kong, but trended significantly lower to South Korea, Japan and China. Exports to Taiwan were below the record levels of 2022 but did not decline as sharply as in the larger Asian markets.

"There are certainly bright spots for U.S. beef, with exports rebounding in Mexico and demand in several Western Hemisphere markets the strongest we've seen in years," said USMEF President and CEO Dan Halstrom. "But economic conditions in our largest Asian markets

and the sharp rebound in Australian production and exports have been persistent obstacles over the past year, making it a sharp contrast with the tremendous 2022 performance for U.S. beef exports."

He added, "Despite these challenges, we still see sustained demand for chilled U.S. beef, and the U.S. remains the dominant supplier of chilled beef entering Korea, Japan and Taiwan."

Lamb exports trending lower

November exports of U.S. lamb totaled 115 mt, down 64% from a year ago, while value fell 50% to \$817,000. January-November exports were 18% below the previous year's pace at 2,169 mt, while value was 17% lower at \$11.5 million. Exports trended higher to Costa Rica, Guatemala, the Netherlands Antilles and Barbados, but these gains were offset by lower shipments to Mexico and Canada.

A detailed summary of the January-November export results for U.S. beef, pork and lamb, including market-specific highlights, is available from the USMEF website. — **USMEF**

LEGAL LEDGER

CA ballot petition gains signatures

The Coalition to End Factory Farming, a group of animal activists campaigning to ban concentrated animal feeding operations (CAFOs) in California's Sonoma County, is moving along in their signature-collecting process. In an emailed release, the group said it has collected 26,000 signatures for the ballot initiative and it is working to collect the final 4,000 signatures. The coalition has more than 100 volunteers helping to collect signatures. "It's time that we move away from factory farming in order to protect animals, local farmers, the environment and public health," the group said in its email. The Coalition to End Factory Farming is backed by the San Francisco chapter of the activist group Direct Action Everywhere. The group is attempting to put the initiative on Sonoma County's 2024 ballot.

MO bans China-owned land near military

Missouri Gov. Mike Parsons (R) recently issued Executive Order 24-01, which bans foreign adversaries from purchasing agricultural land within a 10-mile radius of military facilities in the state. "With heightened concerns regarding ownership of Missouri farm land by foreign adversaries, especially China, we are signing this order to safeguard our military and intelligence assets, prevent security threats to our state, and give Missourians greater peace of mind," Parsons said. Nations currently classified as foreign adversaries include China, Cuba, Iran, North Korea, Russia and Venezuela. The order does not affect existing landowners. State statutes currently cap foreign agricultural land purchases at 1% of total agland. The new order creates stricter requirements for the land purchases and also approval from the Missouri Department of Agriculture.

Comments sought on NV solar project

The Bureau of Land Management's (BLM) Las Vegas Field Office will be opening a comment period on a proposed solar project near Las Vegas, NV. The agency is proposing an environmental assessment and regional mitigation strategy on 1,635 acres of public land 10 miles northeast of Las Vegas. The area was designated as a preferred location for solar energy development in 2020. "The BLM has developed an environmental assessment and regional mitigation strategy for the application that proposes construction, operation and eventual decommissioning of 200 MW photovoltaic solar facility with 200 MW of battery energy storage and an additional 400 MW battery energy storage facility," BLM said in a news release. To submit comments on the proposal, visit tinyurl.com/yc3fattb. Comments open Jan. 19.

Risk management training funds available

USDA's Risk Management Agency (RMA) is providing \$3 million for cooperative agreements to educate producers on risk management and climate-smart practices. The Risk Management Education Partnerships provide funding for organizations to develop training and resources for underserved, small-scale and organic producers about risk management options. "This funding is integral to our outreach efforts in communities that historically have not had access to training about risk management options," said RMA Administrator Marcia Bunger in a statement. Interested organizations may apply for funding through grants.gov by March 4.

NV wildflower petitioned for ESA listing

An environmental group recently petitioned the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) to protect Nevada's Carson Valley monkeyflower under the Endangered Species Act. "As the Carson City metropolitan area keeps booming, we need to make sure the plants and animals that make this place so remarkable aren't lost in the shuffle," said Patrick Donnelly of the Center for Biological Diversity, the listing petitioner. The monkeyflower grows on soils in sagebrush habitat primarily within Carson City and Douglas County.

College could be pricier for ag families

The American Farm Bureau Federation (AFBF) reported on a recent "Newline" podcast episode that attempts to change the student aid process could make college more expensive for rural Americans. The omnibus bill passed at the end of 2023 contained a smaller bill called the FAFSA Simplification Act, which aimed to shorten the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) form. There was previously an exemption on the farm for families who owned farms or small businesses, but that exemption was not included in the FAFSA Simplification Act. "Families with an adjusted gross income over \$60,000 will be subject to the asset test," said Chad Smith, AFBF director of government relations. "The change means it will cost farm families a lot more money to send their children to college." Legislation has been introduced in Congress to reinstate the exemption.

Proposal for NM national monument

A community effort has launched to designate a national monument in southern New Mexico. The proposed 245,000 acres is located in Luna County, NM. Supporters say the area hosts diverse wildlife and plants and is home to cultural and historic sites. The Mimbres Peaks National Monument Coalition said it strongly supports the preservation of ranching in the potential monument lands. "Ranching actively continues in New Mexico's most recent BLM managed national monuments, the Organ Mountains-Desert Peaks National Monument, and Rio Grande del Norte National Monument," the group said.

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AAA 20805870

CED: 10 • BW: .1 • WW: 67 • YW: 113
\$W: 63 • \$B: 164 • Pap: 39 • WR: 106

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Farmer convicted for bank fraud says court erred on restitution

A Nebraska farmer sentenced to 36 months in prison for bank fraud and ordered to pay \$5.1 million in restitution recently asked a federal appeals court to force the lower court to reconsider the sentencing.

In a brief filed in the U.S. Court of Appeals for the 8th Circuit, George Liakos, 64, of Gering, NE, said the district court judge erred in setting the restitution amount.

Liakos was sentenced in late October after he pleaded guilty to one count

of bank fraud. He had faced a grand jury indictment going back to October 2021 on four counts of bank fraud and one count of making a false statement. Liakos was ordered to pay restitution to First Interstate Bank. "In making its final decision, the trial either failed or refused to consider Liakos' evidence on the valuation issue," Liakos' attorneys said in the brief.

"The court's failure to fairly consider such evidence was an abuse of discretion. The bank already

has its money judgment which Liakos must contend with. The amount of the loss and restitution should be recalculated to give effect to the purposes of restitution and not reward the bank for its misconduct in the disposition of the collateral. That amount should not be more than \$1 million."

Liakos argues the court "erred and/or abused its discretion" by not considering what he said was a "deficiency" in the bank's failure to consider the fair market value of Liakos'

collateral.

Doing so, the brief said, would be enough to "satisfy debt" to the bank.

Beginning in April 2017 and continuing through May 2019, Liakos misrepresented the number of commodities he had in storage, cattle inventory and crop acres.

In addition, Liakos concealed his debt from Great Western Bank to secure approximately \$11 million in loans, according to the U.S. attorney's office in Nebraska.

"Liakos' evidence estab-

lished that the fair market value of the real estate and improvements was more likely around \$11 million," according to the brief.

"The loss and restitution amounts should be based upon that valuation. Liakos offered evidence that the real estate was worth substantially more than the \$7.5 million the bank received and that was credited against the debt."

Liakos owned about 2,000 acres of farm ground, according to the brief, that he claims is worth at least \$8.5 million.

"Liakos' complaint that the \$7.5 million to \$8 million credited the debt was unreasonable is supported by evidence," the brief said.

"It was not based upon a finger in the wind or wild speculation or guess. The bank should have recovered at least \$10 million to \$14 million for the real estate."

Great Western Bank, which was acquired by First Interstate Bank, was a banking corporation with locations in Iowa, Colorado, South Dakota and Nebraska, including a banking office in Scottsbluff, NE. Great Western Bank's

deposits were insured by the Federal Deposit Insurance Corporation.

Liakos conducted a farming operation in Bayard, NE, primarily growing beans, corn and sugar beets as well as raising cattle.

To obtain money from Great Western Bank, on June 2, 2017, Liakos executed loans and a security agreement with the bank. The loans and security agreement consisted of a revolving line of credit, a machinery and equipment loan and a livestock loan.

In approving the loans and security agreement, Great Western Bank relied on information from Liakos reflecting current commodity and livestock inventory, accounts receivable, loans and accounts payable that he knew "materially overstated his commodity inventory and materially understated and failed to report loans and accounts payable," according to the U.S. attorney.

As a result of Liakos' scheme, Great Western Bank sustained a \$3.9 million loss. — **Todd Neeley, DTN staff reporter**

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Are you managing your pastures 'ugly'?

Back when no-till farming was fairly new, one familiar catch phrase was "Farm Ugly." Managing pastures in a more regenerative fashion sometimes appears a bit ugly too.

Most producers will begin feeding hay this month if they haven't already started. Hay supplies are low in many areas so getting the most out of what you have available becomes very important.

First, and something nobody ever likes to hear, is that cows that are poor producers, didn't get bred back in a timely manner or didn't get bred back at all should grow some wheels. When winter feed is of a premium, slackers need to go.

You want to be as efficient as possible feeding hay. It might be easier to put out enough hay for several days or even a week, but doing so usually increases waste. Having a little competition between cows when feeding hay is actually a good thing. They are much more likely to clean it up and waste less when they think the other cows are after the same bite.

Unless you have certain nutritional needs for a particular bunch of livestock, it is generally better to feed poorer quality hay first. That poorer quality hay can also be supplemented as needed and hopefully you have tested some of the hay in advance in order to know its limitations. It's much easier to move from

poor quality to good quality than the reverse, especially when the supply is limited. Nobody wants to eat broccoli after having ice cream.

Hay fed in rings or feeding wagons slows down picking and sorting of the hay by the livestock and increases efficiency.

Hay fed on pasture while the soil is dry, in dry lots that have enough structure, or in winter feeding buildings all help to keep hay out of the mud with less waste.

Probably one of the most efficient ways to feed hay is sadly one of the least used today—small square bales. Small bales were allocated to the livestock on a daily and as-needed basis and usually inside the barn in the manger. There was very little waste feeding hay this way. Labor is the most limiting factor for small bales today.

Winter allows us to change our daily pace just a little bit with hopefully a little less work outside and a little bit more time inside with family or a good book. Before we know it, the gray, brown and white days of winter will start turning multiple shades of green again.

A good time to start sourcing clover seed for frost-seeding is in the near future!

Remember, it's not about maximizing a grazing event, but maximizing a grazing season! Keep on grazing! — **Ohio State University Extension**

Ag land values susceptible to 1980s-like crash

At least a couple of cuts in the Fed interest rate are likely in 2024, offering short-term support for farmland values; but the astounding growth in land values remains susceptible to a 1980s-like crash as the country's long-term debt problem looms.

Speaking Jan. 9 at the Land Investment Expo in Des Moines, IA, a pair of former presidents of the Federal Reserve Bank of Kansas City raised concerns about the national debt, the Fed's increased role in credit markets, and the risk of a financial crash as a result.

Until this potential crisis hits, farmland remains a valuable investment and the "possibility of one or [two] rate cuts in 2024 is pretty high" to avoid a recession, said Tom Hoenig. Now a senior fellow at George Mason University, Hoenig led the KC Fed from 1991-2011.

Hoenig spoke at the Land Investment Expo with his successor, Esther George, who was president and CEO of the KC Fed from 2011 until last year. Initially talking about whether the U.S. economy will have a "soft landing," George said inflation remains a challenge for the central bank.

"That bump right now in inflation is still too high," George said. "Yes, it's been coming down and that really creates a dilemma for the Fed on how long to keep its interest rates high, when it can begin to back off, and I think that creates a lot of uncertainty," George said. "It certainly would create uncertainty for a group like this when thinking about land values and financing."

Hoenig said one of the factors that influences land values is the amount of money the Fed has printed in the last four years. The Fed continues to increase the money supply in the economy, though it has slowed down. Investors continue looking for places to put that money in the economy, which is a driver for a range of investments from cryptocurrency to farmland.

"If you are going to put your money somewhere you are going to put it into an asset that has a better chance of appreciating or holding value for a long time," Hoenig said of land investments.

Historic land value increases

The rise in farmland values over the past three-plus years has been "astounding," said Bruce Sherrick, director of the TIAA Center for Farmland Research at the University of Illinois.

He pointed to three-year rates of return in farmland values that include yearly average gains of 19% in Kansas, 18% annual growth in Nebraska, 16% in South Dakota, and 15% in Iowa. Other strong performers for land values included North Dakota and Indiana at 14% average yearly increases and Minnesota at 13%.

"We just came through a period of time where much of the land in this country is up 50% to 60% from only three, three and a half years

ago," Sherrick said. "That's an astounding feature."

He added, "There are gains that have been just unprecedented against history."

In comparison, the S&P 500 over the past three years is up about 26%.

Printing money has been a factor in those rising land values. Sherrick pointed to trade aid payments under the Trump administration, followed by pandemic payments. Commodity prices were then boosted as world trade recovered from COVID-19. The war in Ukraine then added to the price increases for commodities, Sherrick said.

"We had all of these things that added to the farmers' ability to buy their neighbors' land," he said.

Farm income is coming down from highs in 2022, but Sherrick noted, "It's going to be down from a record, but it's not going to be low."

Farm programs will remain, and more investment will come into agricultural land through wind, solar, carbon pipelines, carbon credit payments and other green investments that will add more revenue streams.

"We have a whole bunch of these coming and I don't know how to sort them out, but none of them look bad for agriculture," Sherrick said.

Hoenig also referenced the likelihood of new cash flows coming from income streams tied to a green economy that will help support land values.

A risk, Sherrick said, is in trade policy, especially if trade wars return. "Tariffs and trade wars hurt both sides, and they especially hurt a primary exporter, which in agriculture would be us," he said.

Enormous fiscal balloon

The global geopolitical challenges right now include both cold wars and hot wars that will further fuel U.S. defense spending, while interest on the national debt is going to be hitting \$2 trillion a year. Combined with government entitlements, Hoenig said the country faces an "enormous fiscal balloon" while the Fed is trying to clamp down on inflation. Hoenig said that's going to put upward pressure on interest rates.

"The Federal Reserve is going to be put into this incredible bind," Hoenig said. "On the one hand, if they keep their balance sheet tight and keep interest rates higher to bring inflation down, they will slow down the economy."

He added, "On the other hand, if they ease too soon and begin to accommodate the needs of the federal government for spending and print more money, inflation will go up. So how are you going to balance that?"

Scary long-term view

All of this leads to "so much uncertainty out there right now," over how Fed moves will affect farmland or other real estate, as well as manufacturing and the economy

overall, Hoenig said.

The growing annual federal budget deficits are going to eventually slow down the nation's economy. Hoenig pointed to Congressional Budget Office (CBO) projections that the national debt will move from \$34 trillion to \$55 trillion over the next decade. The federal deficit will become 7.5% of gross domestic product. Spending so much just to satisfy government debt payments will slow the growth of the economy.

"That means your nation's productivity falls, and wealth falls, and that's the long-term consequence of this and the

Fed has to know that," Hoenig said.

Farmland values will increase until a crisis occurs. Depending on how much debt leverage is in the economy, "then we have the 1980s all over again," Hoenig said. "Again, that's a scary long-term view."

Hoenig and George both said Congress has to stop relying so heavily on the Fed to deal with multiple crises over the past 15 years to keep printing money without restraining federal spending.

"You heard this phrase throughout the financial crisis, 'The Fed is the only game

in town,'" George said. "And it was a phrase that meant the Fed will act and the Fed ... does not want to see instability in the economy. The Fed will act and Congress will let it act, and you saw this more recently with the pandemic."

George highlighted the Fed's purchase of corporate credit markets and municipal bonds, all done with good intentions, but reflecting a continued expansion of the Fed's role.

"When you begin to expand the footprint of the central bank, one of the real tennets you have to watch is that the central bank has to be

independent of those bodies, although completely accountable to Congress," George said. "So, the risk is you lose that independence just by default in doing that. As Tom said, you don't want the people spending the money to be directing the people who print the money."

George added the Fed "has been called on to act too much," and now has a footprint that includes mortgage products as well as buying U.S. Treasury securities. "It's an uncomfortable place for the Federal Reserve to be in."
— Chris Clayton, DTN ag policy editor



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Managing water supplies this winter season

Cold weather is here to stay for the remainder of this winter season. This creates a challenge for producers who house their herds in areas where there are limited water resources and available natural water sources (including ponds, creeks and stock dams) may be frozen over.

Even though water supplies are thought of during hot summer weather to aid in cooling of the body, cattle require this nutrient during all seasons. Water is still required for bodily functions and obtaining production goals during the cold,

bitter winter months. A general rule of thumb is that mature cattle require 1 gallon of liquid water per 100 pounds of body weight.

Cattle may ingest clean snow and utilize it to meet their overall water requirements when it is available. Moisture in the form of snow was hard to come by this early winter in South Dakota. We cannot always rely on snow being available, and some cows will not ingest enough snow to meet their water requirements. Water intake is highly correlated with feed intake, and given the low-

er quality of dormant forages, we want cattle to be able to eat at their highest capacity.

Ice can inhibit cattle's ability to access water. While cattle may be willing to break through thin ice, it is not a guarantee, and once the ice gets too thick, it is impossible for the animals to break. Ice should be broken periodically to allow access to a water source. This includes natural water sources if those are the main access to water. If breaking ice on a pond or large creek, do not break ice too close to the bank or too far out. Breaking ice too close to the

bank causes cattle to agitate the water and mud, reducing water quality; breaking ice too far out increases risks of falls and injuries.

Managing water sources

Water sources should be checked frequently, as cattle cannot go without water for extended periods of time. In periods of adverse weather, a plan should be in place for assuring that cattle have access to water.

Cattle may decrease water

intake during blizzards and ice storms in an effort to conserve energy resources, however, a minimum requirement for bodily function is still needed. If the water tank is heated by an electrical source, a backup power source should be in place in the event of a power outage.

Furthermore, it is important to check for electrical shorts running through the water supply periodically. These currents may deliver a shock to cattle as they attempt to drink, thus lowering water consumption.

When deciding on what portable tank to use to haul water, make sure that it has not been used with any type of chemical (for example, herbicides, insecticides or strong cleaning chemicals). This includes the pump and hoses used to transport water. If you are unsure if the tank has been exposed to chemicals, do not use it. Small amounts of certain chemicals can have extreme negative effects and may cause death in cattle. Assure these tanks and their parts are cleaned regularly. Water quality is still a concern during the winter months.

Always provide a source of liquid water to cattle. At times, hauling water may be more

economical if the herd can graze longer, rather than being fed hay and other harvested feedstuffs. That being said, do not overgraze winter pastures, as this has negative impacts on future forage production. When deciding whether to haul water to cattle or bring the herd to a location with better access to water, do not forget to factor in the price of time and labor required to haul water. Other factors to account for include distance from the filling location to where the cows are located, and time spent filling portable tanks and stock tanks.

Take home points:

- Cattle can ingest snow to meet water requirements; however, liquid water should still be provided.
- Check water sources regularly and break ice if necessary.
- Have a backup plan for assuring water access for cattle during adverse weather or power outages.
- Do not haul water in tanks and equipment that have housed chemicals.
- Do your homework when deciding if it makes sense to haul water versus moving the herd to a location with better water resources. — **South Dakota State University Extension**

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CED	BW	WW	YW	Milk	Marb	\$M	\$W	\$B	\$C
9	-0.1	86	147	19	0.91	86	77	178	317



CED	BW	WW	YW	Milk	Marb	\$M	\$W	\$B	\$C
5	2.9	78	129	22	0.59	63	62	151	259



CED	BW	WW	YW	Milk	Marb	\$M	\$W	\$B	\$C
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Revising crops' water loss to conserve groundwater

As the state sitting above the largest portion of the U.S.' largest aquifer, Nebraska relies on groundwater not just for hydrating, but irrigating. In growing corn, soybean and other crops, Nebraska farmers irrigate roughly 60% of their fields—more than 8 million acres, the most of any U.S. state.

Though groundwater does get replenished by precipitation and snowmelt, human activity has begun to test just how renewable it is. In 2020, Nebraska U's Conservation and Survey Division reported that, while the volume of groundwater under the eastern half of Nebraska has generally increased over the past four decades, the aquifer under its semiarid western side has instead lost groundwater—in some pockets, 50-plus feet of it. Less groundwater means less irrigation and, by extension, lower crop yields, underscoring the importance of maximizing every drop.

To calculate the irrigation demanded by a given crop in a given locale, researchers rely on equations that factor in evapotranspiration: the water lost by evaporation and via transpiration, whereby water taken up by plants later escapes through leaf-coating pores. After consulting an evapotranspiration value for a so-called reference crop, researchers multiply that value by another number—a coefficient, usually between 0 or 1—to determine the evapotranspiration (and irrigation needs) of other crops, including corn and soybean.

So what? Some recent research has suggested that the coefficient should decrease

when the atmosphere is especially thirsty—when temperature, humidity and other variables make it more prone to suck up moisture from the land below. If true, crops may be losing less water than expected amid higher temperatures, wind speeds and other conditions characteristic of a water-sapping atmosphere, potentially because they close their pores in response.

Researchers from the Daugherty Water for Food Global Institute recently looked into whether the same phenomenon might hold in the Cornhusker State. Ivo Gonçalves and colleagues analyzed a decade of data from an irrigated Nebraska field that rotated between corn and soybean, as many farmers do.

Though coefficients mostly agreed with their commonly accepted guidelines when evapotranspiration was low, those guidelines tended to overestimate the coefficient for both corn and soybean as evapotranspiration surpassed a certain threshold—one crossed during roughly 40% of the analyzed timeframe. That was especially the case in 2002 and 2012, years stricken by drought.

Now what? The team recommended revising the coefficient values for corn and soybean that are grown under conditions associated with particularly high evapotranspiration. Those revisions could help avoid overestimating the irrigation needed to successfully cultivate the crops, the researchers said—conserving groundwater, saving energy and minimizing agricultural runoff while maintaining yields. — **Nebraska Extension**

Ten tips to bulletproof your beef operation

Beef producers can use a window of profitability to make their farm business more bulletproof.

University of Missouri (MU) Extension agricultural economist Joe Horner said successful beef producers can make small changes in three areas to make their farm less vulnerable to risks: plants, animals and business. Being good in just one of those three areas is not enough.

Longtime producers see the big picture and plan to withstand cycles in the industry. Drought is a recurring theme for Missouri farmers, Horner said. Producers should not look at drought as an emergency. "Drought is going to happen. Build a standard operating procedure on your farm to manage it," he advises. "Prepare yourself to glide through it."

One safeguard against drought is to invest one time in making or buying 50% more hay than you normally need. Carry that hay inventory over every year. That becomes a strategy to keep drought from forcing you to buy hay or sell cattle in a drought.

A 50% hay cushion you can rotate through every year comes as a one-time investment that is tax-deductible. With high calf prices projected for 2024, farmers will be looking for deductions.

Younger farmers are looking at interest rates they've never seen in their lifetimes, said Horner. Since the Great Reces-

sion in 2008, lending rates were artificially low until this year. Normal times have returned. Older producers have seen these high-interest cycles before and will manage differently than younger producers. Managing cash and reducing debt becomes more important, said Horner.

Livestock producers are now 10 years into a 10-year cycle, he said. Cow inventories are tight. Feeder calves available to feed will get tighter as higher prices encourage people to keep more heifers on-farm. Economists are forecasting good prices ahead.

"2024 will be as good as any time we've seen since 2014," he said, with producers holding back heifers. "Periods like the next two to three years only happen a few times in a 50-year farming career."

Horner predicts that these higher margins will lead farmers to look for tax deductions. Rather than buying a new pickup or farm equipment, Horner recommends that producers first invest in a Top 10 list to make their farm business more profitable and resilient when the cattle cycle inevitably turns with lower prices.

Horner gives 10 tips to increase profits:

1. Have a separate bull pasture. A defined breeding season reduces odd lots at the sale barn. Lots of like calves sell at higher prices. Batch calving is easier to manage.

2. Follow your veterinarian's

advice. Follow vaccination schedules and test for bull soundness. "Veterinarians create value on your farm because of what they know. Pick your vet's brain and follow their suggested protocol," Horner said.

3. Invest in good cattle handling facilities. Properly designed and maintained handling facilities make cattle working easier. Easy jobs get done, and good facilities lead to fewer injuries. "You can't put a price on your family's safety," he said.

4. Invest in good fences for weaning. Bawling calves bring

less money at the sale barn, so do the extra work. Wean calves before selling. Buyers pay more for weaned calves.

5. Carry 50% extra hay inventory. Add 50% more hay stock once and rotate out hay yearly. The carrying cost is a good investment. "That's your drought insurance, and it is easier than finding hay and it makes life less stressful," said Horner.

6. Do soil tests. A soil test will tell you if you need to add nutrients to boost yields. Lime is a cheap, undervalued nutrient.

7. Convert some pastures to native warm-season grasses.

Warm-season grasses make your operation more drought-resilient, need less fertilizer, boost summer calf gains and can improve herd reproduction performance. State and federal incentives are available to plant natives.

8. Convert to rotational grazing. Rotational grazing systems make managing cattle and forages easier. A system allows producers to mitigate drought, improve soil health, increase forage production and extend the grazing period.

9. Understand risk insurance programs. Study the MU Ex-

tension publications "Pasture, Rangeland, Forage (PRF) Insurance in Missouri" and "Livestock Risk Protection (LRP) Insurance" and work with a trusted insurance agent. PRF insures against drought. LRP insures against low prices.

10. Seek the advice of a farm tax preparer. The IRS has new resources to measure compliance. Talk to your tax preparer to make sure your farm is bulletproof. Comply with reporting rules for contractors and laborers who need to receive 1099 or W-2 forms. — **MU Extension**

WaterSMART helps increase efficiency

Getting water to his cow-calf operation in Summit County in Utah was a constant challenge for Stephen Kladis. With the open system bringing water from the Peoa South Bench Canal, "We were losing half of our water before it even got to our first turnout," Kladis said.

In the two years since the canal was converted from an open ditch to a gravity pressurized pipe, Kladis and other agricultural producers are seeing the benefits from increased irrigation efficiency to lower maintenance costs and better production.

The project is one of five completed in Utah through the WaterSMART Initiative (WSI), a joint effort between the Bureau of Reclamation and the USDA's Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS). The initiative utilizes targeted funding from the Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) to conserve water in Western states and increase drought resilience. The funding also helps producers apply conservation practices to complement the Bureau of Reclamation's WaterSMART programs.

Four other priority areas in the state have focused on improving water efficiency from the West Cache Canal. Work has converted more than 15 miles of earthen canal to pressurized pipe, installed sprinkler systems to replace flood irrigation, and constructed a

centralized pump station to improve water delivery from the Bear River.

"Since the start of this important effort we've invested \$4 million through EQIP-WSI in Cache, Morgan and Summit counties, assisting 64 producers across more than 4,700 contracted acres to reduce drought stress on crops, protect crop health, and conserve water," said Emily Fife, NRCS state conservationist for Utah.

Utah is one of 16 states involved in the initiative with a total of 45 priority areas identified and \$29.7 million available in EQIP funding. NRCS and the Bureau of Reclamation announced nine new priority areas for fiscal year 2024, including one in Utah budgeted for \$700,000 in Cache County. The project will install pressurized pipe, a telemetry system and pump stations.

The collaboration between NRCS and the Bureau of Reclamation is a priority of the National Drought Resilience Partnership. EQIP funding from NRCS helps producers apply conservation practices to complement projects funded by the Bureau of Reclamation WaterSMART programs. Reclamation's WaterSMART investments help states, tribes and local entities plan for and implement projects that increase water supply by providing funds to modernize existing infrastructure and otherwise build drought resilience. — **USDA**

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WW	70
YW	124
\$M	66
\$B	161
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Sire: Sitz Accomplishment 720F
MGS: Baldridge Bronc

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CED	12
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USDA pushes back on congressional criticism of ERP math

USDA is pushing back on questions from Congress about how the department came up with its payment factor for the 2022 Emergency Relief Program (ERP).

Members of Congress from both parties sent letters to USDA questioning the methodology for issuing payments under ERP, which skews payments to provide a higher percentage of aid for smaller losses.

A dozen Republican senators wrote the Government Accountability Office asking for an examination into USDA's "progressive payment factor" that they see as disadvantaging larger farmers who had the biggest disaster losses.

The GOP blog cited that farmers with losses under \$30,000 receive higher ERP payments under USDA's progressive factor. Farmers with larger losses than

\$30,000 see their payments go down compared to having a flat factor for payments.

In a response to DTN, USDA broke down the total number of producers in which the payment received under Track 1 of ERP was greater than or equal to 27%, which was a "flat factor" and which producers received less than the 27% factor.

USDA issued a total of 344,773 payments, but that involved 210,500 farmers because some producers received payments for multiple crops. Out of those 344,773 payments, 278,834 of payments, or 81%, were equal or greater than what they would have been under the 27% payment factor. Another 19% of payments, or 65,939, were less than the 27% factor.

With more than 80% of all payments coming in at

\$30,000 or less, nearly 170,000 farmers received higher payments than they otherwise would have collected. About 40,500 farmers—likely with higher losses—are receiving lower payments than expected.

Some state comparisons

Among states with higher numbers of disaster-aid recipients, California was one where just 59% of farmers are receiving equal or higher payments, 6,538 of them. Another 41%, or 4,487 farmers are receiving lower payments.

Nebraska is the state with the highest number of farmers receiving lower payments at 8,945 farmers, which makes up 23% of the farmers eligible for ERP payments in that state. Another 30,711 farmers, or 77%, in

Nebraska are receiving equal or higher payments.

A USDA spokesperson told DTN that it would have been "unavoidable" that all farmers would receive less assistance compared to prior years under ERP because Congress provided \$3.2 billion in assistance to cover nearly \$12 billion in uncovered crop losses.

The American Farm Bureau Federation last spring projected the uncovered losses around \$10.5 billion.

The USDA spokesperson stated, "This unfortunate circumstance required USDA to make decisions and develop a formula that would ensure farmers whose operations were most at risk because of unpreventable losses were the ones who received the smallest reductions on their payments."

"That means, for example, that the smallest operations that are least able to withstand a financial blow were prioritized as part of our goal, through this and other programs, to keep farmers on their land."

The USDA spokesperson added that a system that provides more disaster assistance to larger farmers actually "picks winners and losers" rather than tilting

payments more towards smaller farmers.

"We hope that Congress will take note of this situation as they make funding decisions going forward, and that they consider how designing programs that best help the largest farms is in fact the real system that picks winners and losers while tying USDA's hands."

USDA officials also noted more than \$19 billion in crop insurance indemnities were also paid out to producers as well through crop insurance or USDA risk management programs.

USDA also had paused ERP payments while the Farm Service Agency (FSA) finalized some verification processes to prevent improper payments, the spokesperson said. FSA started sending ERP payments back out again on Dec. 5.

Payments to larger states

Among states with at least 10,000 ERP payments received, the number of producers receiving equal or higher payments broke down as such:

• Kansas: 45,132 farmers, 82% are receiving equal or

larger payments than they otherwise would have received. On the negative side, 10,217 farmers, 18%, are receiving lower payments.

• Texas: 46,242 farmers, 85%, are receiving equal or greater payments; 7,967 farmers, 15%, received lower payments.

• Nebraska: 30,711 farmers, 77%, are receiving equal or larger payments; 8,945 farmers, 23%, are receiving lower payments.

• South Dakota: 15,260 farmers, 71%, are receiving equal or larger payments; 6,176 farmers are receiving lower payments.

• North Dakota: 14,404, 78%, are receiving equal or larger payments; 4,145 farmers, 22%, are receiving smaller payments.

• Oklahoma: 10,881 farmers, 81%, will receive equal or larger payments; 2,584 farmers, 19%, are receiving smaller payments.

• Colorado: 8,233 farmers, 80%, will receive equal or larger payments; 2,070 farmers, 80%, are receiving lower payments.

• California: 6,538, 59% will receive equal or larger payments; 4,487 farmers, 41%, are receiving lower payments. — **Chris Clayton, DTN ag policy editor**

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Did California's ag overtime law really help farmworkers?

Proponents of California's agricultural overtime law, Assembly Bill (AB) 1066, have called it a victory for farmworkers, while critics have asserted that it will harm the very people it was designed to protect.

New research by Alexandra Hill, University of California (UC) Cooperative Extension specialist and assistant professor in UC Berkeley's Department of Agricultural and Resource Economics, shows that on average there has been a decrease in worker hours and wages.

Her estimates suggest that in the first two years of its implementation, California's farmworkers worked a total of 15,000 to 45,000 fewer hours and earned a total of \$6-9 million less on their weekly paychecks than they would have with-out this law in place.

In 2016, California passed AB 1066, legislation that removed existing overtime exemptions for farmworkers in the Fair Labor Standards Act (FLSA). The FLSA is the federal law that mandates many employment conditions, including overtime standards. In non-exempt industries, it requires that employers pay 1.5 times an employee's regular pay rate for any hours worked beyond 40 hours per week.

Prior to AB 1066, agricultural workers in California were entitled to overtime pay for hours worked beyond 60 hours per week, but AB 1066 changed this

beginning in 2019. The law mandated a gradual phase-in (over four years) of reduced overtime thresholds (lowering the weekly hours threshold by 5 hours/week each year) until agricultural employees are subject to the same overtime standards as workers in other industries (40 hours/week).

Many farmers feared that this new policy would drive food prices up, push them out of business or force a faster transition to mechanization. Most reported that they would reduce hours for individual workers to remain below the new overtime standards and avoid paying the higher rates.

However, media, advocacy groups and others heralded the law as a major win for farmworkers, as it would provide workers with more fair compensation for long workweeks. While long-term effects of the law for farmers and farmworkers remain to be seen, Hill's work sheds light on the early effects of the law on worker hours and earnings.

Using worker-reported hours from the National Agricultural Workers Survey both before and in the two years after the law went into effect (2019 and 2020), economist Hill explored the effects of AB 1066. Overall, she finds that worker hours and earnings decreased as an effect of the legislation.

Her work highlights that the share of workers working 56-60 hours/week, just below the old overtime

threshold, decreased by roughly half. Most of these workers shifted to working fewer hours; the share working 46-50 hours/week, just below the new (as of 2020) overtime threshold, increased by roughly one-third. She found similar reductions in worker earnings.

The share of the workforce with higher weekly earnings (between \$600-800/week) decreased by roughly one-third, with most of these workers shifting into a lower earnings bracket of \$400-500/week. These changes in hours and pay are consistent with employers behaving as they claimed they would—by cutting hours to avoid paying overtime rates.

Hill notes that these decreases in average wages and hours may be positive for those who want more leisure time and may—due to shorter workdays and weeks—improve workplace safety. However, she also warns that this can be detrimental for "workers and their families who were depending on this lost income to cover living expenses (and who) may now need to seek out second employment opportunities, negating these other benefits and adding the inconvenience of traveling between jobs."

To learn more about the effects of AB 1066 on California farmworkers, read the full article at tinyurl.com/26ybftb4. — **UC Agriculture and Natural Resources**

Healthy CA reservoir levels offset scant snowpack depths

Unlike early 2023, when nonstop atmospheric river storms built a deep Sierra Nevada snowpack, replenished depleted reservoirs and flooded parts of California, snowfall and rain is sharply diminished so far this year. But state water officials say there is plenty of winter left to accumulate more snow and precipitation.

California Department of Water Resources (DWR) State Climatologist Michael Anderson said accumulation of snowpack has just begun, pointing out that half the state's annual precipitation typically occurs during December, January and February.

"This period of really wet/really dry was definitely on display last year, but what we're seeing this year is not quite the strength of either wet or dry, so everything is a little bit subdued," Anderson said.

In the days since DWR's first Sierra Nevada snow survey of 2024, storms added more snow, increasing the early January statewide snowpack figure of 25% of average to 36% of average. At this time last year, the state's snowpack measured 117% of average, which is more than half of the average yearly total.

"It's really still too early to determine what kind of year we'll have in terms of wet or dry," said DWR Snow Surveys Manager Sean de Guzman. "There can be so many things that happen with our storm systems between now and April, when we should see our peak snowpack."

Recorded on April 1, the state's peak snowpack data is used in modeling by DWR to determine the amount of runoff the state can anticipate when snow melts in the spring and summer. The snowpack supplies about 30% of the state's water needs. "What we're interested in is how much water is in the snowpack," de Guzman said.

Glenn County farmer Mike Vereschagin, who farms almonds and prunes in Orland, CA, said he remains optimistic about the coming water year, especially with reservoirs at or above their historical capacity due to snow and water accumulated in 2023. DWR reported that statewide reservoir storage is about 115% of average.

"As far as water supply this year, it is way too early to know what our allocation is going to be, but the positive thing is our water comes from Shasta Reservoir, and the reservoir level is above normal," said Vereschagin, who serves as board president of the Orland-Artois Water District, which received 100% of its contracted water supplies last year. "Compared to two years ago (during the drought), it is a much better situation. As long as they conserve the supply and don't just release it out of the dam, there should be enough water for a decent allocation."

A north-of-delta water contractor of the federal Central Valley Project (CVP), Orland-Artois Water District receives 53,000 acre-feet of water annually and serves about 29,000

acres. As of Jan. 8, Shasta Reservoir—the largest CVP reservoir—was at 69% of its 4.5 million-acre-foot capacity, or 115% of average, according to DWR.

Most other reservoirs remain at above-average levels. Lake Oroville, the principal reservoir for the State Water Project (SWP), was at 69% of its 3.5 million-acre-foot capacity, or 128% of average. San Luis Reservoir, a south-of-delta reservoir shared by the CVP and SWP, stood at 57% of its 2 million-acre-foot capacity—88% of average.

Fresno County farmer Justin Diener of Red Rock Ranch in Five Points, CA, which grows grain, garlic, tomatoes, cotton and almonds, said the water outlook is positive.

"This year, things look a lot better just on a relative basis because of the amount of water that is in storage in the reservoirs," said Diener, who is on the board of directors for Westlands Water District, a CVP water contractor. "It's not raining as much as it did last year, but our reservoir storage is in a much better position."

The CVP portion of available water stored in San Luis Reservoir, a joint state-federal reservoir, he said, is about 80%.

"For us on the west side, when there's a strong, wet year, the following year we usually have a good water year, plus a moderate or average 40% to 60% allocation," Diener said. "We're in a good position."

With water in San Luis Reservoir, Diener said he was able to prepare for the growing season.

"We have kept the same crop setup, where we're growing quite a bit of grain and garlic because we will

have water to some degree," he said. "We don't (yet) know how much water we'll have into May and June, but it won't require as much to finish those crops."

Even with a 100% water allocation last year, Westlands Water District farmers followed 198,700 acres, or about 35% of total acreage, according to the district's 2023 crop report. The fallowed acres, Diener said, is likely due to timing of the allocation announcement. Since precipitation came late last year, many farmers did not have the opportunity to line up as many crop contracts by the time the

full allocation was announced in late April.

"In our area, a lot of the preparatory work and obtaining of contracts to grow crops takes place in the fall," he said.

Looking ahead, state water officials announced recently that extreme weather events highlight the need for Californians to prepare for flood risk. DWR noted it is working with emergency response partners and reservoir operators to prepare flood infrastructure.

As part of this effort, farmers hope to take advantage of flood flows for groundwater recharge, such as in 2023, to replenish aquifers, which are required to reach sustainability by the 2040s under the state's Sustainable Groundwater Management Act (SGMA). Vereschagin said last spring and summer, growers in his district took advantage of available floodwater for groundwater projects.

"Our records show that we have made a difference," Vereschagin said. "We did the recharge, and hope-

fully we can continue in the future because we have a long way to go to get back to historical levels."

Similarly, Westlands Water District "implemented several programs to encourage growers to recharge groundwater, both for the benefit of the collective district and of individual growers," Diener said. The district recharged more than 200,000 acre-feet since last March, he added.

"Hopefully, we'll get 275,000 acre-feet to 300,000 acre-feet (of recharge). If we do that, going forward on our SGMA plan, we'll have multiple years of sustainability in terms of averaging out the years we pump a lot and years we don't pump or pump a moderate amount," Diener said. "This is a real tool that we've been successful in using to move our groundwater basin more quickly towards sustainability."

The next DWR survey at Philips Station is scheduled for Feb. 4. — **Christine Souza, Ag Alert assistant editor, California Farm Bureau Federation**

"As far as water supply this year, it is way too early to know what our allocation is going to be, but the positive thing is our water comes from Shasta Reservoir, and the reservoir level is above normal."

— Mike Vereschagin

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16	54	-0.01	0.71	0.68	176.3	101.3	16	34	-0.20	0.77	0.82	172.8	99.5	22	47	-0.06	0.75	0.58	166.8	97.3

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GW JAILBREAK 555J x GW MISS ADVANTAGE 413H		GW MOVIN ON 183C x GW MISS YUKON JACK 938E		GW WARHEAD 210J x GW MISS PREDOMINATE 491E																
HETERO BLACK HOMO POLLED 5/8 SM 1/4 AR 1/8 AN		RED HOMO POLLED 1/2 SM 5/16 AR 3/16 AN		HOMO BLACK HOMO POLLED 5/8 SM 1/4 AR 1/8 AN																
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14	-1.0	92	142	6	32	78	18	-3.2	84	137	8	27	69	11	-1.5	88	140	7	28	72
DOC	CW	YG	MARB	REA	API	TI	DOC	CW	YG	MARB	REA	API	TI	DOC	CW	YG	MARB	REA	API	TI
18	36	-0.15	0.46	0.43	156.2	94.9	15	44	-0.30	0.38	1.03	155.8	92.3	15	42	-0.02	0.76	0.43	170.0	99.4

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THE VIEWPOINT

with Jennifer Boka

This exclusive column found only in WLJ features unique perspectives from some of the nation's top producers, marketers, animal health experts, economists and more.



Jennifer Boka

Courtesy photo

Jennifer Boka, director of livestock operations at Denver's National Western Stock Show (NWSS), is passionate about the history of the 118-year event, creating an experience for those in the agriculture industry and welcoming those who live in an urban setting.

"My goal here is to bring an essence of hospitality and create an atmosphere where every exhibitor knows that they are wanted at National Western, and that National Western values them whether they are coming with junior market livestock, whether they're coming with carloads, or whether they're in our Catch-A-Calf program," Jennifer told WLJ.

"All of us have a unique opportunity as both exhibitors and leaders of the stock show to share the mission of agriculture with the non-agricultural industry," she continued. "My goal is to make sure that all of those exhibitors feel welcome and that we continue to develop opportunities for them and showcase agriculture to the concrete jungle."

Jennifer said it is essential that the livestock department

at NWSS stays relevant to the industry and focuses on every animal that comes through the ring while maintaining the event's history.

NWSS is undertaking the construction and renovation of buildings throughout the campus, including the completion of the Cille and Ron Williams Yards and their centerpiece, the HW Hutchison Family Stockyards Event Center. The Sue Anschutz-Rodgers Livestock Center and the connected Legacy Building are also under construction, which are due to be completed soon.

Jennifer said visitors will be impressed with the new event center and commented that she is in awe with the size, and that it complements the changes with the new sale rings that have been in place.

"I think when people pull into the grounds this year they will be awestruck by the size of the building and the fact that there will be nothing like it when this thing is done," Jennifer said. "It is going to create an enthusiasm and excitement among exhibitors that we haven't seen in a very long time."

New additions

To further build upon that excitement and focus on the commercial cattleman, Jennifer said they brought back the Stockmen in the Stockyards commercial heifer show and sale, which had many consigners.

"Look at the history of National Western and what it was founded on," Jennifer said. "It was founded on lots of cattle coming in on the train cars, and National Western wouldn't be what it is today if we didn't have that commercial car load show that started the event."

Also new this year was an educational lineup with CattleFax CEO Randy Blach, Jeffrey Folmer of Allied Nutrition and other speakers presenting on the opening weekend of NWSS.

Jennifer said the excitement has carried over to the commercial cattleman as the number of pen entries increased to 286 this year. Jennifer continued she initially heard some apprehension about the amount of space available with the increase in entries, but she replied it was about getting more people in front of the cattle and to the yards.

Jennifer said it took her and her staff hours to coordinate when breeds were leaving and entering the grounds, and they did their best to accommodate the increase in entries. She said she couldn't do it without her staff and people like Leon Vick, vice president of Rodeo, Horse and Livestock Operations. Jennifer said Leon builds a great team and brings a unique perspective as a commercial cattleman with a rodeo background, encouraging her ideas or telling her to throttle back.

Jennifer believes that many cattlemen and women who haven't come to NWSS in the last few years might have felt the focus hasn't been on the commercial side or that the event didn't fit their operation. Jennifer said the commercial sales and educational opportunities allow ranchers to get off the ranch, discuss issues and come together as registered and commercial operators to improve their herd and operations.

The traditions are also continuing at NWSS with the Catch-A-Calf program and the opportunity for youth to showcase their animals on a significant stage. Jennifer hopes the traditions can continue to grow.

"I just think it's a mainstay here at National Western, and even if these kids stop showing and age out of 4-H and FFA, we know we are contributing to society some great kids with a strong work ethic and a desire to take care of another life through ag projects," Jennifer said.

In addition to NWSS being a showcase for the best cattle and genetics to cattlemen and women, Jennifer said there is a more significant message in hosting the event by showcasing agriculture to the general public. In light of anti-agriculture legislation and talk, Jennifer said NWSS has promoted agriculture for the last 118 years with a mission of agricultural improvement and advancement.

"I would say that my biggest mission this year is to make sure that while we're taking care of our own, we're also gathering up our own to stand together for Colorado agriculture," Jennifer said.

NWSS held the Stockyards Beef Festival last year and other events to showcase agriculture and stewardship to the general public. Jennifer described the event as connecting the best operations with the best vintners in the state and region with people from the Denver metro. Last year's event was sold out, and the event is scheduled to take place again this year.

"Connecting the mindset between that glass of wine and that ribeye to the producers that are grassroots, boots-on-the-ground people is something that National Western needs to focus on and we hope to continue to develop that evening so that more and more people get that exposure," Jennifer said.

Close to home

Jennifer was born in Colorado and she recalls that her family brought paint horses to show at NWSS when she was an infant. The family has a Simmental operation north of Fort Collins, CO, and she began showing the breed at shows nationally and regularly at the American Junior Simmental Association's National Classic. Jennifer went on to participate in judging teams at Northeastern Junior College in Sterling, CO.

Her early career was in the artificial insemination business as a representative for ABS, then as the Red Angus Association of America communications director. She then became the general manager of the Northern International Livestock Exposition (NILE) in Billings, MT. Jennifer said her time at NILE building a good team and being involved with all the aspects of the operation benefitted her coming into her role at NWSS.

"You take those skill sets from all of your background—whether we're talking about rodeo productions to the cattle shows that I've been involved with—it all brings you a skill set in a job like this. I can't imagine stepping into a role like I have here without all of those life experiences coming together," Jennifer said.

Jennifer said it felt really good coming back to NWSS, and although Colorado has changed so much with the traffic, it still feels like home.

"It feels great to be here and we have such an awesome team here at National Western," Jennifer said. "They're really letting us grow this event in a direction where you can take tradition and you continue that tradition to grow and bloom into some other great things, so it's a really great feeling to be back here," Jennifer said.

She added, "And I don't think there's any better place to see the best of the best in the livestock industry than the Super Bowl of livestock shows here in Denver." — Charles Wallace, WLJ contributing editor



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Report reveals rural population up, poverty down

—Rebound in jobs

After experiencing a decade of population loss, a recent report by USDA's Economic Research Service (ERS) reveals that the trend and rate of persistent poverty are reversing.

ERS recently released "Rural America at a Glance," focusing on trends in population, poverty rates, housing security and employment in nonmetropolitan regions of the U.S.

The report determined that in recent years, the shifts in rural America's population, poverty and employment reveal three key findings. First, the rural population is experiencing growth after a decade of negative or stagnant rates, primarily fueled by domestic migration. Second, while rural poverty has generally decreased over the past 15 years, housing insecurity remains a concern for low-income renters, especially among American Indian, Alaska Native and

Hispanic households. Lastly, rural employment has nearly fully rebounded from the COVID-19 pandemic, returning to modest annual growth rates comparable to pre-pandemic levels.

Population

ERS defines nonmetropolitan areas as a combination of open countryside, rural towns (with populations under 2,500), and urban areas ranging from 2,500-49,999 people that are independent of larger labor market areas (metropolitan areas).

According to the report, as of July 2022, the population in nonmetropolitan areas was 46 million, comprising 13.8% of the total U.S. population.

Over the period from mid-2020 to mid-2022, the nonmetropolitan population saw a growth of approximately a quarter percent, a growth phase following declining or near-zero annual growth

rates between 2010 and 2020. The upswing was primarily attributed to gains in net domestic migration, surpassing natural declines resulting from more deaths than births during the same period.

"Fear of exposure to COVID-19 in metro areas and the subsequent increase in remote work contributed to a major shift in migration patterns," the report said. "Net migration declined for metro areas and a mirror-image jump in nonmetro net migration occurred at the same time."

While many nonmetropolitan counties experienced net domestic in-migration—especially those near large metro areas and in recreation and retirement destinations—42% of nonmetropolitan counties saw a decline in population due to net domestic out-migration.

Poverty and housing

Along with net migration, persistent poverty rates—

poverty rates greater than or equal to 20%—experienced a slight decline.

The report noted that in the period ending in 2021, there were 318 persistent poverty counties (combining metro and nonmetro areas), a decrease from 353 counties in the period ending in 2011. Among these, 282 counties maintained persistent poverty status, while 36 counties entered into this category and 70 counties exited.

Nonmetro counties constituted 84.9% (270 counties) of the 318 persistently poor counties for the period ending in 2021. Within this, 244 counties remained persistently poor, 26 counties entered into persistent poverty status and 55 counties departed from it.

Along with poverty, the report looked at housing insecurity. The report defined housing insecurity as various housing-related issues that lead to instability in shelter, poverty and health concerns for individuals and families.

Between 2015 and 2019, over half of extremely low-income and one-quarter of very low-income nonmetropolitan renter households encountered housing issues. Additionally, nearly one-quarter of American Indian, Alaska Native or Hispanic (any race) nonmetropolitan households faced severe housing problems, a rate approximately 10 percentage points higher than that of all other racial groups.

Employment

"Jobs are a major contributor to rural household well-being," the report said. "Following nonmetropolitan job losses of 10% in 2020 due to the COVID-19 pandemic, nonmetropolitan household employment rebounded in 2021 and continued to recover throughout 2022 and 2023."

As of the first quarter of 2023, nonmetropolitan employment had nearly fully recovered, reaching 99% of

pre-pandemic levels. In 2022, nonmetropolitan annual employment growth was 0.5%, returning to rates comparable to those observed in the years before the pandemic. Additionally, the nonmetropolitan unemployment rate decreased from 11.3% in 2020 to 3.8% in 2022.

The report noted that in 2021, over 243,000 jobs, accounting for 1% of total employment, were in the clean energy sector in nonmetropolitan counties. In contrast, approximately 239,000 jobs in nonmetropolitan areas were associated with coal, petroleum and natural gas fuels. The proportion of clean energy employment in nonmetropolitan regions varied among U.S. states, ranging from less than half a percent in Arizona to 2.6% in Vermont. Among all states, Texas had the highest number of clean energy jobs in nonmetropolitan counties. — Charles Wallace, WLJ contributing editor

Beef buyers ask court for jury trial

FIXING (from page 1)

industry-wide slaughter and capacity reductions, corroborate Witness 1's account," the beef purchasers' suits read.

Other structural characteristics of the domestic beef market, including high concentration in the wholesale beef industry, facilitated the packers' conspiracy, the beef buyers claimed. The suits contend that the packers' position at the top of the supply and distribution chain allowed them to exploit their role of buying cattle to control upstream cattle pricing and downstream beef pricing.

The suits named other market characteristics that supported the conspiracy, such as "producer concentration, high barriers to entry, inelastic demand, the commodity nature of beef, frequent opportunities to conspire, strong demand and/or market share stability."

Conspiracy plans

The suits allege the packers began exploiting favorable market conditions by at least the beginning of 2015. More specifically, the suits noted the coordination between the packers on the prices they would pay for fed cattle, and their respective slaughter volumes.

"Thus, over time, the output of beef was reduced resulting in higher beef prices for purchasers like Plaintiff, during the Conspiracy Period," the suits read.

The beef buyers cited USDA data that showed the average cattle and beef price spread substantially higher from January 2015 through 2021 compared to the preceding five years. From 2010-14, the average spread was about \$34, but from 2015-21, the spread increased 143% to nearly \$83, they

cited.

"In a competitive beef market, if a competitor reduces its price paid for fed cattle, then other competitors would be expected to increase purchases, so they could boost output and increase their profit and market shares," the plaintiffs explained.

Therefore, "Only colluding meatpackers would expect to benefit by reducing their prices and purchases of slaughtered cattle because they would know that their conspiracy would shield them from the dynamics of a competitive marketplace."

As a result of the alleged conspiracy, the beef buyers suffered antitrust injury by paying illegally inflated prices for beef, the suits asserted.

Previous investigations

In 2020, it was reported that the Department of Justice (DOJ) subpoenaed Tyson Foods, JBS, Cargill and National Beef regarding information relating to their pricing practices dating back to early 2015. The DOJ investigation followed an earlier Senate hearing where former USDA Secretary Sonny Perdue announced USDA had begun an investigation into beef prices.

In 2021, a group of senators penned a letter to the DOJ, voicing concern with potential packer antitrust violations.

"From our perspective, the anticompetitive practices occurring in the industry today are unambiguous and either our antitrust laws are not being enforced or they are not capable of addressing the apparent oligopoly that so plainly exists," the letter read.

The beef buyers demanded a trial by jury. — Anna Miller, WLJ managing editor

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The impact of adaptive grazing management on CRP lands

Researchers at the Texas A&M AgriLife Center for Grazinglands and Ranch Management are investigating the impact of grazing practices on the long-term sustainability and biodiversity of landscapes enrolled in the USDA's Conservation Reserve Program (CRP).

Supported by the USDA Farm Service Agency, the project will focus on adaptive grazing practices such as managed timing, intensity, frequency, duration and resting period.

"The Conservation Reserve Program continues to be one of the signature conservation efforts of the USDA," said Jeff Goodwin, Ph.D., director of the Center for Grazinglands and Ranch Management. "The effort has a 38-year legacy of successfully protecting the nation's natural resources while providing significant economic and environmental benefits to rural communities across the U.S."

Established in 1985, CRP is one of the nation's largest private-land conservation programs with more than 23 million acres enrolled across the U.S.

Through contracts varying in length from 10 to 15 years, voluntary participants agree to remove environmentally sensitive cropland from agricultural production and devote the land to the long-term conservation of grasslands, soil health, water quality and wildlife habitat. In return, these landowners receive annual payments and cost share assistance to implement conservation-based management practices.

Texas' enrolled landscapes

In Texas, more than 90% of the roughly 2.7 million acres enrolled in CRP are in the High Plains and Rolling Plains ecological regions.

Due to this density of enrolled properties, Goodwin

and research partners in the Texas A&M College of Agriculture and Life Sciences will focus their studies within these regions.

Collaborating researchers include Katie Lewis, Ph.D., Texas A&M AgriLife Research soil chemistry and fertility scientist and associate professor in the Department of Soil and Crop Sciences; and Stephen Webb, Ph.D., Texas A&M Natural Resources Institute research assistant professor in the Department of Rangeland, Wildlife and Fisheries Management.

Since its inception, CRP has excluded grazing on enrolled lands with certain exceptions for emergency drought and disaster events or biennial grazing regimes outside of the grassland bird nesting season. Producers who do graze at a reduced stocking rate during the primary nesting season generally receive a 25% reduction in their an-

nual payment from the program.

Historically, grassland ecosystems were maintained by periodic disturbances in the form of fire and grazing ruminants such as bison.

Goodwin said the removal of these disturbances can lead to the proliferation of less-desirable vegetative communities. Woody encroachment, land conversion, land fragmentation, invasive species and poor grazing practices have also contributed to the precipitous decline in native grassland health, as well as the avian species that depend on them.

"There is a common misconception that cattle production and conservation cannot coexist and have mutually exclusive goals," Goodwin said. "But as the adage goes, 'it's not the cow; it's the how.'"

Goodwin said an increasing amount of scientific research suggests that by

focusing on ecological principles, grazing animals become yet another tool in the toolbox to help conserve and manage wildlife habitat and other ecosystem processes.

Specifically, researchers are seeking to answer three key questions related to lands enrolled in CRP:

- Can adaptive grazing management provide greater ecosystem and climate change mitigation benefits than biannual grazing or grazing exclusion?

- Are the conservation and ecosystem benefits of adaptive grazing management influenced by native versus introduced grass species?

- Can grassland birds be used as an indicator metric for the health and function of CRP lands in the Texas High Plains?

To find these answers, over the next five years researchers will employ and replicate a variety of land management treatments across 18 properties en-

rolled in the program. These different management treatments include grazing exclusion, as well as alternative year grazing and adaptive grazing management techniques.

This investigation will enable researchers to collect valuable data on soil organic carbon and microbial activity, vegetation composition and structure, plus the presence or absence of high-priority avian species.

"Information gained from this study will benefit a number of stakeholders by providing data-driven insights and scientific evidence to inform Conservation Reserve Program policy on the ecologic outcomes associated with the implementation of grazing management," Goodwin said. "Ultimately, this study will continue to inform the scientific literature serving as a scientific basis of support for the conservation of working lands in the U.S."

— Texas A&M AgriLife Extension

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Using agriculture residues for fuels and chemicals

Research led by University of California (UC), Davis, sheds new light on how to access the sugars locked up in plant materials to convert byproducts into new feedstocks to produce fuels, materials and chemicals.

Converting grasses, weeds, wood and other plant residues into sustainable products normally produced using petroleum products will be key to achieving carbon neutrality.

"We want to utilize plant residues and there is a lot of plant waste out there," said Tina Jeoh, a professor of biological and agricultural engineering at UC Davis.

The research, published in the journal *Green Chemistry*, will help lower the technological barrier and make it easier for the sustainable conversion of plant material, including agricultural byproducts, Jeoh said.

Jeoh used a spectromicroscopy tool at Lawrence Berkeley National Laboratory to measure enzyme reactions in real time to changes in the environment. The technology allows for simultaneous imaging and chemical analysis.

Unlocking sugars

Biocatalysts, which accelerate chemical reactions, need sugars for certain conversions, such as fermentation. Cheap, renewable and sustainable sugars that don't compete with food demands are key to that transformation.

"These sugars are key to establishing a bioeconomy built on cycling renewable carbon for biofuel, bio-

chemical and biomaterial alternatives to fossil fuel sourced versions," Jeoh said.

Finding a better way to unlock sugars could advance the technology used in sustainable production operations.

"The emerging biomanufacturing industry is developing new catalysts to make compounds that will replace fossil fuels," Jeoh said. "Most of these are based in fermentation technology and there's still this question of 'Where does the sugar come from?' How are enzymes interacting at the surface of the plant residues to efficiently break bonds to release sugars?"

The technology at the Berkeley Lab, which was funded through a U.S. Department of Energy program, allows researchers to analyze infrared wavelengths and characterize biochemical processes in both place and time.

"It actually really confirmed a lot of what we thought we were seeing, which is very exciting," Jeoh said.

Next up for Jeoh is to explore how the enzymes work to release sugars from the plant residues at nearly the molecular level.

Jennifer Danger Nill, who graduated from Jeoh's lab in 2019 and now works at the biotechnology firm Amyris, contributed to the research, as did scientists at Lawrence Berkeley National Laboratory and Lawrence Livermore National Laboratory.

The work was supported through several Department of Energy grants. — UC Davis College of Agricultural and Environmental Sciences

Professor trains computer to spot invasive weeds

To manage johnsongrass, a noxious weed that crowds out cotton and sickens horses, farmers have tried herbicides, burning and hand-pulling. Now, researchers at University of California (UC), Davis, have developed a more high-tech weapon against the invasive weed: artificial intelligence and machine learning.

Using photos from Google's Street View database, UC Davis researchers have tracked down over 2,000 cases of johnsongrass in the western U.S. for a fraction of the cost and time that it would take to do drive-by or other in-person surveys. They call their tool Google Weed View.

The advancement could help land managers easily and quickly survey for other problem plants.

"Once the model is trained,

you can just go and run it on millions of images from Google Street View," said Mohsen Mesgaran, an assistant professor in the Department of Plant Sciences at UC Davis. "We have huge flexibility, and its capability can be scaled up very quickly."

The technique can easily be extended to other plant species. All that is needed is to label the new item in Street View photos and train the algorithm to identify that object in the images.

By providing location information, Google Weed View also offers an opportunity to examine how climate affects the growth and spread of weeds and invasive plants at very large scales.

"I think it can be both useful for management and for people with interests in more basic questions in ecology," Mesgaran said.

A colleague's query

Mesgaran began looking at using Google's photo database of roadways, streets and highways after Kassim Al-Khatib, a professor of Cooperative Extension in the same department, asked if he could survey Western states for johnsongrass.

Al-Khatib studies where johnsongrass grows, ways to manage it and how this perennial has evolved to be so prevalent and resilient. He's also working with scientists at the University of Georgia to decode the genome of johnsongrass, which is one of the top 10 most invasive weeds worldwide.

Johnsongrass can crowd out native plants, harbor pathogens and affect agriculture. It grows up to 7 feet tall with flowers that are green, violet, dark red or purplish brown depending on maturity, according to a

UC Statewide Integrated Pest Management Program briefing page.

"Johnsongrass is a major weed not just in California but worldwide," Al-Khatib said. "It's very difficult to control. It's a problem on vineyards. It's a problem for cultivated crops. It's a problem on orchards."

Google Weed View allows for rapid, convenient scanning. It is continuously updated via everyday users with compatible cameras and images collected by Google. "Instead of a day of in-person driving, we can use AI to determine if johnsongrass is in a county or not," Al-Khatib said.

Setting the parameters

To find the weeds, Mesgaran went to Google Street View, which hosts billions of panoramic photos. It didn't take long to find johnsongrass.

"The pictures are really good quality," he said. "You can see plants and flowers."

Street View's photos offer a 360-degree view, so in his request Mesgaran set parameters, based on street direction (bearing), to only see the side view. He also specified latitude and longitude, and other factors. To train the deep, or machine learning model, he chose Texas, where johnsongrass is prevalent.

A student sorted through over 20,000 images from that request to find pictures with johnsongrass and drew rectangular shapes around the weeds. They located 1,000 images.

The labeled photos were fed into a computer to train a deep learning algorithm capable of identifying johnsongrass in Google's images. The model was run again to capture potentially more images containing johnsongrass.

These additional images were then labeled and used to further refine the model.

With each iteration, the algorithm learned and became more accurate.

"This deep learning model was trained by these images," Mesgaran said. "Once we had a semi-working model, we ran it against about 300,000 images."

For Al-Khatib's request, researchers focused on 84,000 miles of main roads in California, Nevada, Oregon and Washington states. The team discovered 2,000 locations with johnsongrass.

Google Weed View cost less than \$2,000 to purchase the images and teach the model. A traditional car survey to cover the same area would cost an estimated \$40,000 in gas, hotel, food and other costs.

"In a matter of months, we came up with 2,000 records and I can do it for the whole U.S.," Mesgaran said.

Next up? The entire U.S. — UC Davis College of Agricultural and Environmental Sciences

Dry weather leads to slow winter start

"Warm temperatures and lack of precipitation over the last couple months have resulted in a bleak start to the seasonal snowpack in Montana and northern Wyoming river basins," said Eric Larson, USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) water supply specialist.

Water year 2024 began with a mid-October snowstorm that brought about two to five inches of precipitation to parts of northern Wyoming and southern Montana. Totals from that storm were less across the rest of Montana, particularly in the northwest where river basins such as the Kootenai, Lower Clark Fork, Flathead and Saint Mary only received less than an inch of precipitation and less than half of their normal October precipitation.

"Precipitation was largely absent during November and December, except in northwest Montana which received reasonable precipitation during the first half of November and December," said Larson.

Two-month precipitation in that region was about 75-100% of normal. Snow Telemetry (SNOTEL) Network sites in the northern Whitefish Mountain Range received about 130% of normal precipitation over the two months. Across the rest of the region, November and December precipitation was about 40-60% of normal, except in the Bighorn Mountains and Helena area where precipitation was about 35-45% of normal.

Water year precipitation currently ranges from about 55-80% of normal on the west side of the Continental Divide to about 100-115% of normal in the Bighorn, Powder and Tongue River basins, "which is only above normal because of the large mid-October storm," said Larson.

Water year precipitation has been lowest in the Sun,

Teton and Marias river basins at about 50% of normal. Central, southcentral and southwest Montana have received about 65-80% of normal precipitation since Oct. 1.

As of Jan. 1, Montana's seasonal snowpack ranges from about 25% of normal in Sun, Teton and Marias river basins to about 75% of normal in the Bighorn, with most basins reporting less than 60% of normal snowpack conditions.

The maximum snow depth across the region is currently about 36-38 inches in Glacier and Yellowstone national parks and surrounding areas, which is about 10-12 inches of snow water equivalent and is 60-80% of normal. In addition, "about 110 of 175 NRCS snow stations measured on Jan. 1 are reporting their lowest or second lowest snowpack on record. Some of those records date back nearly 90 years," said Larson.

There are three to four months remaining in the normal snowpack accumulation season. Current snowpack deficits are generally about two to four inches, with a couple exceptions at upper elevations in Montana where deficits are closer to seven to nine inches of snow water equivalent below normal.

"It would take a major change in what the last couple months brought for weather, but it's still early and current deficits could be recovered in a couple large storms," said Larson. Regardless winter weather needs to arrive soon. The further winter progresses with below normal precipitation, the more challenging it will become to make up from a lack of snow.

A full report of conditions on Jan. 1 can be found in the monthly Water Supply Outlook Report available on the Montana Snow Survey website at tinyurl.com/4et82rfe. — USDA

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Spring pasture management for horses

Green grass can be a great addition to a horse's health, both mentally and physically. Horses love the taste of green grass and it can be very nutritious during the right stages of maturity, not to mention the joys of being out in a pasture relaxing and being a horse. However, spring grass can bring some risks so be aware and follow the spring checklist for a safe and healthy spring.

Greener pastures are springing up across the country. For most of us, this is good news because green grass relieves some pressure of searching for quality hay at a reasonable price. Horse owners are also starting to spend more time with their horses and are looking forward to even more enjoyable riding weather.

Manage pastures slow and steady.

Going from dry hay and grain to lush, green pasture is a drastic change in a horse's diet and may increase the risk of founder, colic or laminitis. Slow and steady is the key. Allow horses to graze for an hour or two at first, then gradually increase grazing time by an hour every couple days until they are out full time. Continue to provide supplemental hay during this transition period.

Horses that are kept in the pasture full time will gradually become accustomed to the emerging green grass as it comes up. In those cases, a transition isn't usually necessary and horses will voluntarily begin to leave their hay when there is adequate pasture to graze.

Ensure adequate space.

Another part of pasture management for horses is to determine if there is enough pasture for grass to be a significant source of nutrition. Consider the available acreage, type of forage and the number of horses or stocking rate.

The very best horse pastures may support one horse per acre, but average conditions may require closer to 2 to 3 acres to sustain one horse grazing full time. An effective stocking rate will depend on the type of grass, fertilization and rainfall.

For shorter varieties of grasses, such as Kentucky bluegrass, pasture must grow 3 to 4 inches tall to provide adequate forage for horses.

Taller grasses, including Coastal bermudagrass,

should sustain a height of 6 to 8 inches. Stocking rates may be improved if there is an option to rotate pastures.

Grazing tall forage varieties down to 3 to 4 inches and shorter varieties to 2 inches in height, then rotating to another horse pasture for four weeks can help maximize grazing potential of available acreage.

Provide an adequate diet.

Horse pasture in the spring often looks beautiful and nutritious but can be very high in water and low in fiber content. Thus, not meeting a horse's minimum requirement for dry matter intake.

Provide 10 to 15 pounds of dry hay per day as needed until the horse pasture matures. Depending on

your horse's workload, a well-rounded diet can help keep your horse in tip-top shape.

As work level increases, performance horses may need more nutrition, especially calories, than hay or spring pasture can support. In these cases, supplemental feed will be important to maintain body condition and to support performance and health.

Choose the performance feed that best fits your needs and feed the amounts needed to maintain your horse in good body condition.

The amount of feed may vary depending on workload and quality of available hay or pasture. Keep in mind that pasture quality will vary as the forage matures through spring and into summer.

For easy keepers who don't need supplemental feed to maintain good body condition, provide a ration balancer product.

Maintain good horse body condition score.

On that first warm, sunny day, it's very tempting to head out to the barn for a nice, long trail ride. However, if you have not been riding your horse regularly through the winter, your horse is likely not condi-

tioned for physical activity.

To prevent muscle soreness, start with slow, easy work and short workouts, and gradually increase the intensity and duration of the workouts until your horse is adequately conditioned. It may take up to 90 days to get a horse properly conditioned for strenuous physical workouts.

Also, use body condition scoring to find out what kind of shape your horse is in as you transition out of winter. Scoring focuses on areas of the body where body fat is deposited and gives a number score for how fat or thin the horse is, based on palpable fat and visual appearance.

Most horses are at their best when maintained at a moderate body condition of 5-6 on the score chart.

With a few tweaks to your pasture management, ensuring your horse is adequately conditioned for the desired workload and choosing the right nutritional support to compliment your forage and support your level of activity, you'll be ready to head out and take in the warmer weather and sunshine. Enjoy! — **Karen E. Davison, Ph.D., Purina Equine Technical Solutions director**

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\$62.5M allocated to develop ESA recovery

ESA (from page 1)

Coast. Large amounts were also spent on renowned animals like manatees, right whales, grizzly bears and spotted owls.

The analysis revealed 7% of funding was spent on mammals, followed by birds at about 5%, plants at around 2% and insects at 0.5%. The Virginia fringed mountain snail is at the bottom of the spending list, receiving only \$100 in 2020. Despite being sighted once in the past 35 years, it surpasses over 200 imperiled plants, animals, fish and others receiving no financial support.

Species drawing no funding included stoneflies threatened by climate change in Montana's Glacier National Park, the California tiger salamander impacted by development, and flowering plants like the scrub lupine in Orlando, FL, where native habitat has been converted for theme parks.

Some scientists argued in the journal *Science* that few species have recovered to the point of being delisted from the ESA. The reasons include a shortfall in funding and whether resources prioritize species facing imminent extinction or those with potential long-term benefits.

"For a tiny fraction of the budget going to spotted owls, we could save whole species of cacti that are less

charismatic but have an order of magnitude smaller budget," Leah Gerber, professor of conservation science at Arizona State University, told AP.

AP noted that spending inequities stem from a combination of biological challenges and political influences, which is evident in the costly efforts to restore salmon and steelhead populations constrained by hydroelectric dams. These species enjoy broad political support from Native American Tribes and commercial fishing interests advocating for fisheries restoration. Over the years, Congress has allocated substantial funds to agencies like the Bonneville Power Administration, responsible for dam operations, funding initiatives such as fish ladders, habitat restoration, scientific monitoring and various requirements.

To address the underfunding problem, wildlife officials aim to utilize funds allocated for endangered species in the climate law enacted last year by President Joe Biden. According to AP, \$62.5 million is intended to facilitate hiring biologists to develop recovery plans, initially focusing on 32 species and potentially expanding to encompass up to 300 species in the years ahead. — **Charles Wallace, WLJ contributing editor**

Growth promotant technologies: Impact on beef production, meat quality

A study conducted by South Dakota State University (SDSU) researchers evaluated the impact additive combinations of growth-promotant technologies can have on beef carcass characteristics and tenderness.

This study evaluated four combinations of growth-promoting technologies: no technology, antibiotic treated, implant treated and beta-agonist treated. The treatments were designed to build upon each other with increasing amounts of technology. The no-technology group served as the control and received no antibiotics, beta-agonists, ionophores or implants.

The antibiotic-treated group was administered therapeutic antibiotics as needed, as well as monensin and tylosin during the finishing phase. The implant treated group was administered the antibiotic regimen and a series of implants, including a suckling calf implant, a moderate-potency

initial feedyard implant and a high-potency finishing implant. The beta-agonist-treated group was administered the implant treatment regimen, and the beta-agonist ractopamine-HCl for the last 30 days before harvest. The four treatments were designed to represent different cattle feeding systems used in the U.S.

Methods

A set of 120 Angus-Simmental cross steer calves were allocated to one of the four treatments. There were three phases of this experiment: Phase 1, from the beginning of the experiment at branding through weaning; Phase 2, post-weaning through the beginning of the finishing phase, where the steers were fed in pens; and Phase 3, finishing phase when the steers were fed in an individual feed intake system through harvest.

The growing diet fed at the beginning of Phase 2 con-

sisted of dry-rolled corn, grass hay, dried distiller's grains with solubles, and limestone. The finishing diet fed at the end of Phase 2 and all of Phase 3 consisted of dry-rolled corn, wet corn gluten feed, grass hay and a vitamin and mineral supplement.

The steers were ultra-sounded to predict harvest date at a common 12th rib backfat thickness of 0.6 inches, which resulted in two harvest groups. The no technology and implant treatments were harvested on the first harvest date and the antibiotic and beta-agonist treatments on the second harvest date.

The steers were transported to a packing plant and carcasses were tracked through the facility. Carcass data and a strip loin were collected from each carcass and transported back to SDSU. The strip loins were cut into New York strip steaks and used to measure tenderness.

Results

Minimal differences were observed between the no technology and antibiotic treatments or between the implant and beta-agonist treatments. Because of this, the results in this article will largely focus on the impact of implanted (implant and beta-agonist treatments) versus non-implanted (no technology and antibiotic treatments) cattle.

Steers that received implants had increased body weights compared to non-implanted steers through all phases of the experiment. Additionally, implanted steers had increased average daily gains and better feed conversion (feed:gain) than non-implanted steers.

The carcasses of implanted steers had heavier hot carcass weights than non-implanted steers. Ribeye area was largest in carcasses of steers from the implant treatment, the antibiotic treatment had the

smallest ribeye area and the ribeye area of the no-technology and beta-agonist treatments was in the middle. Despite the differences in hot carcass weight and ribeye area, all treatments had similar yield grades, because increased hot carcass weights were offset by increased ribeye area in the yield grade equation. Carcasses of implanted steers had decreased marbling scores and fewer carcasses that graded USDA Prime compared to carcasses from non-implanted steers.

As expected, steaks from all the treatment groups improved in tenderness as they aged from seven to 21 days post-harvest. Additionally, steaks from non-implanted steers were more tender than implanted steers.

However, all of the treatments resulted in tenderness levels well below the threshold to be considered "very tender" by the American Society for Testing and

Materials International. This means that while there were differences in tenderness among treatments, the average consumer would likely have a favorable eating experience from a tenderness standpoint with steaks from any treatment.

Conclusion

Implants were the most impactful technology to increase animal weight and hot carcass weight and resulted in the most-efficient feed conversion.

Implants reduced marbling scores and resulted in fewer carcasses grading USDA Prime.

Strip steaks from all treatment groups were well within parameters to be considered very tender.

This research was published across two articles in the open-access journal *Translational Animal Science*. — **Christina Bakker, SDSU Extension meat science specialist**

New findings on impact of ag in WY

A new publication by the University of Wyoming (UW) Department of Agricultural and Applied Economics reports that economic activity related to agricultural production contributed \$2.526 billion to Wyoming's economy in 2021.

This total includes direct farm-gate sales from 11 agricultural industries as well as related business-to-business purchases and spending by agricultural households.

"Everyone recognizes that agriculture is big in Wyoming. Now we have a single publication that allows us to support our comments concerning the importance of ag in Wyoming with economic data," said Eric Webster, director of the Wyoming Agricultural Experiment Station. "I am extremely happy that the Wyoming Agricultural Experiment Station was able to provide the funding to support this project, which highlights the importance of agriculture across the state."

Roger Coupal, a professor in the UW Department of Agricultural and Applied Economics, and Amy Nagler, a research scientist in the department, co-authored the report, which presents both statewide and county-specific data.

Analysis was completed using IMPLAN economic impact modeling software and the most recent data available from the USDA National Agricultural Statistics Service and U.S. Census Bureau.

Unsurprisingly, Coupal and Nagler found that cattle, other livestock (including sheep and hogs) and hay production dominated Wyoming's agricultural production values. In 2021, beef cattle ranching ac-

counted for \$1.031 billion in direct output—nearly 60% of total direct output from agricultural industries.

Overall, livestock production accounted for 77% of Wyoming's direct economic output from agricultural industries; crop production made up the remaining 23%. In total, agricultural production contributed \$1.712 billion to the state's economy in direct farm-gate sales.

Coupal and Nagler also quantified the economic impact of the dollars spent and re-spent in local communities as a result of farm-gate sales. In 2021, for every dollar generated by agricultural production, local purchases supporting agricultural businesses generated an additional 28 cents. Local spending by agricultural industry and ag supply-chain workers generated an additional 20 cents.

In total, business-to-business ag supply chain purchases, such as feed and fencing, contributed an additional \$476 million to the state's economy. Household spending of agricultural industry labor income in local restaurants, retail stores and other establishments added another \$338 million.

"This report from Dr. Coupal and Ms. Nagler clearly shows the importance of agriculture to the economy of Wyoming and the vibrancy of rural economies anchored by our ranching families," said Barbara Rasco, dean of the College of Agriculture, Life Sciences and Natural Resources.

To view a free, downloadable copy of the publication, visit bit.ly/WYEconImpactAg2021. — **UW Extension**

















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Idaho ag enjoyed record 2023 sales of four top commodities

Idaho agriculture overcame a struggling dairy market to record a second consecutive year of stellar cash receipts in 2023, propelled by record values of four of the state's major crops, according to a new University of Idaho (U of I) economic report.

Idaho agricultural cash receipts for the year totaled \$11.157 billion, down by just 1% from the record-high number food producers celebrated in 2022, according to "The Financial Condition of Idaho Agriculture: 2023" by U of I agricultural economists Brett Wilder and Xiaoxue "Rita" Du.

The 2023 report concludes the state's farmers brought in record revenue from sugar beets, up by 25%; potatoes, up by 14%; cattle and calves, up by 18%; and barley, up by 17%.

The U of I economists presented their report during a series of Idaho Ag Outlook seminars, featuring

leading industry experts and hosted Dec. 12 in Idaho Falls, Dec. 13 in Twin Falls, Dec. 14 in Nampa and Dec. 19 in Lewiston.

"We've had back-to-back excellent years to be in Idaho agriculture," Wilder said. "We've had all-time record highs in four commodity groups."

Offsetting some of those gains, however, was an 18% revenue drop from Idaho's top commodity, dairy, which represents nearly one-third of the state's total agricultural cash receipts. Idaho still ranks as the nation's No. 3 producer of dairy, with the value of its production declining to just over \$3.5 billion in 2023. Evidencing Idaho dairywomen's struggles, the USDA's Dairy Margin Coverage Program paid out in Idaho during every month of 2023.

After expenses, however, the report estimates farm profits will be down by 11% in 2023, at \$3.769 billion. It's a strong earnings total,

nonetheless, following Idaho's record 112% net farm income increase in 2022.

"It's a very good number. We're still near all-time highs," Wilder said. "We're down 11% year over year but the U.S. is down 17%, so we're still outperforming the rest of the country. Farmers and ranchers did well in 2023."

Increasing expenses were mostly driven by high interest rates. Farmers' interest expenses are estimated to increase 42% to \$714 million in 2023. Idaho farmers are also expected to take a hit regarding government payments, projected to decline by 22% to \$153 million in 2023.

Looking ahead, economists predict growth in milk prices in 2024, primarily because the U.S. has the cheapest dairy prices, which should give producers an export boost. Idaho is also poised to add new dairy processing capacity. Feed prices, both of hay

and grain, are expected to decline. But Wilder expects the market for cattle and calves will be especially strong in 2024 due to the combination of extremely tight inventory and strong demand. Wilder believes cattlemen have begun keeping their animals much longer to increase carcass weight.

"If you own cows today and don't have to go buy calves at the prices that are being asked, it's a fun time to be in the beef industry," Wilder said.

U of I agricultural economist Xiaoli Etienne, Idaho Wheat Commission Bill

Flory Endowed Chair in Risk Management, predicts most farming inputs will hold steady or decline slightly in 2024. Gasoline prices are forecast to drop 2% in 2024, while diesel prices should remain the same or drop slightly. Farm chemical prices dropped by 20% in the past year and may continue to decline in 2024. The value of Idaho farmland and cropland rental rates should remain stable throughout the coming year. Electricity prices should hold steady or increase slightly, as should machinery costs.

Costs of corn, wheat and

barley seed for planting should increase slightly. Hired labor costs are expected to climb by 2.04%. While the average loan rate rose 35% throughout the past year, the Federal Reserve is expected to begin cutting interest rates in 2024.

Wilder anticipates a more significant drop in agricultural cash receipts will occur in 2024.

"My expectation in 2024 is we should be down below \$11 billion but still above \$10 billion, unless something catastrophic happens," Wilder said. — **U of I Extension**

Ag labor shortages cost KS economy as much as \$11.7B

Kansas State (K-State) University and Kansas Department of Agriculture

economists are reporting findings of a study indicating that alleviating a shortage of farm labor in Kansas could boost the state's economy by as much as \$11.7 billion.

"Accepting the status quo in the labor market is costly," said agricultural economist Jenny Ifft, who is also K-State's Flinchbaugh Agricultural Policy Chair.

She shared findings of a report that pegs the shortage of Kansas' farm labor between 5,627 and 15,873 jobs over 72 agriculture and agriculture-related sectors present in the state—from grain farming and landscaping to meat processing and snack food manufacturing, among many others.

Ifft notes: "Between \$2 billion and \$6 billion in additional economic output could be generated in sectors affected directly if shortages in the labor market were filled."

Taken further, shortages in agricultural labor create an additional 8,466-23,843 unfilled positions through indirect and induced effects, according to the report, which notes that "for each job in agriculture that remains unfilled, roughly 1.5 positions remain unfilled throughout the rest of the state's economy."

"We're not just looking at production agriculture," Ifft said. "Our model accounts for such things as, say, a farmer can't get his grain to market in time (due to a labor shortage), which affects the number of employees a cooperative can hire, which then affects their spending with other businesses in the community."

Parker Vulgamore, a K-State graduate student in agricultural economics and a co-author of the study, said that including indirect and induced effects, "Kansas could generate \$4.1-11.7 billion additional output across the state's economy if agricultural labor shortages were alleviated."

The unrealized economic impact caused by labor shortages represents 1-2% of all Kansas economic output. In total, Kansas could

add 39,000 direct and indirect jobs to the economy by filling agricultural shortages alone.

"More than 60% of the respondents to our survey reported having some degree of labor shortage, varying from 5% up to 60%," Vulgamore said. "But the key point is that this isn't a small issue affecting only one type of business or only one part of the state. It's widespread. But on the flip side, there was about 40% of respondents that reported having no shortage, which means there are things we can do to combat this issue."

Another study co-author—Kansas Department of Agriculture economist Tori Laird—applied a model known as IMPLAN to estimate sector-, industry- and economy-wide effects based on current estimates of labor shortages.

"Anecdotally, we had heard from many agriculture businesses, farmers, ranchers, feed yards and cooperatives across the state that were talking about how they're experiencing labor shortages and its effects on their individual businesses," Laird said.

"But there wasn't any individual effort being undertaken to look at the broader scale and scope of the impacts of labor shortages. There was no number to quantify the impact."

Now, knowing the multi-billion-dollar impact, the researchers note that public and private entities can better understand the potential impact of continued work towards finding solutions.

"This study's findings heightened the urgency for businesses and governments across all levels to address labor shortages," Vulgamore said. "And I think the dialogue surrounding the issue has grown over recent years. There's an array of policies and public goods that can help address shortages, and so hopefully this study and our findings can help inform some of the dialogue surrounding that." — **K-State Research and Extension**

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Don't let cold weather freeze cattle performance this winter

Maybe you can't tell the difference between 15 F and 32 F after spending a few minutes outside, but your cattle can.

"Slight changes in temperature can have a considerable impact on energy and cow nutritional requirements," said Elizabeth Belew, Ph.D., cattle nutritionist with Purina Animal Nutrition.

Cold stress occurs when cattle require more energy to sustain basic bodily functions at a specific temperature, called the lower critical temperature (LCT). The LCT

helps us understand when cows start experiencing cold stress.

"As temperatures decrease, cow nutritional requirements increase. Add in precipitation or wind and requirements increase even more," said Belew.

If cows are shorted on nutrition during cold stress, it can have a domino effect on performance.

"Nutritional deficiency resulting from cold stress can lead to cows producing lighter and weaker calves," said Belew. "Low-quality colostrum and later return

to estrus in the breeding season can also result, compromising conception rates and weaning weights."

Strategies for managing and feeding cattle in the winter can help alleviate cold stress and support cow nutritional requirements.

How can you mitigate cold stress?

Cold stress mitigation should start with keeping cattle warm. Offering protection from the elements like bedding, windbreaks,

snow breaks and a place to get out of the mud can all help keep cattle warm and dry. Protecting cattle from wind, rain and snow isn't always enough, however.

"Snow often reminds us to think about cow nutritional requirements and supplementation options. But what if the snow never falls? Temperature is the underlying factor in cold stress," said Belew.

When feeding cattle in winter, provide them with nutrition to meet their needs during cold stress. Plan out feeding strategies early, before cow body condition scores start to slip, to help your cows weather cold temperatures.

Know your forages

Feeding cattle stored forage can be challenging. Testing forages gives you a better understanding of what you're feeding cattle in winter when temperatures drop. Testing total digestible nu-

trients (TDN) will provide an estimate of the total amount of nutrients that could be digested by the animal. The greater the TDN value, the more energy cattle get from forages.

"Forage intake is another consideration," said Belew. "Cows will likely spend less time grazing as temperatures decline. Less grazing time results in reduced forage intake which makes it challenging to meet cow energy requirements. Feeding cattle in winter with low-quality hay might not be enough to offset reduced forage intake."

Once you know forage nutritional value and assess intake levels, monitor cow body condition score (BCS) and temperature to identify cow energy requirements.

Evaluate nutritional reqs

A cow's energy requirement, or TDN, increases by 1% for every degree below

the LCT as a rule of thumb.

"Cow body condition scores impact nutritional requirements," said Belew. "A cow in a BCS 5 needs 30% more energy to maintain body condition than a cow in a BCS 6 at 32 F. The same principle holds true as BCS decreases below 5."

A third-trimester 1,300-pound cow requires 13 lbs. of TDN at 32 F. However, at 0 F the same cow needs an additional 4 lbs., or roughly 17 lbs. of TDN. For comparison, the temperature drop means the same cow now requires 8 more pounds of 50% TDN hay.

"When feeding cattle in winter, consider a high-quality supplement to help fill a cow's energy gap while helping cows get the most out of existing forages," said Belew. "The ideal supplement should provide additional energy, balance forage nutrient deficiencies and support performance." — Purina Animal Nutrition

Professors create exhibit that explores California's fiery future

Charred land may not look like much at first glance, but a controlled burn can benefit a landscape by rejuvenating the soil, maintaining healthy ecosystems and reducing the impact of future wildfires.

Pyro Futures is a new exhibit at the Manetti Shrem Museum at University of California (UC), Davis that explores the ways fire and fire stewardship can change California's landscapes. The collection was curated by Brett Milligan and Emily Schlickman, professors of landscape architecture and environmental design, who hope to share information they've learned about fire to better inform the public about its benefits.

"It's a more diverse message about fire," Milligan said. "Fire isn't bad, there are so many good and beneficial fires, it's how those fires happen that make a difference."

The exhibit is open now and runs through Jun. 16. Earlier this year, Milligan and Schlickman released their book, *Design by Fire*, which focuses on what people from various communities around the world have been doing to better live with wildfire. They spent years on the project, learning about the history of wildfire in the western U.S. The exhibit features images and objects to tell that story and also presents possible scenarios for the future.

"In the final chapter of the book, we speculate about potential future scenarios we might experience here in California, and this is what really inspired the exhibit," Schlickman said. "In writing that chapter, we realized that our future with fire is not predetermined and that we, as residents, have so much agency in guiding what the future of California might look and feel like."

The exhibit also has interactive elements, including journals where visitors (in-person or online) are asked to share their experiences with wildfire and their hopes and fears for the future.

It also includes a large map of California, which highlights the high fire risk zones. Visitors are encouraged to place a pin on the map of where they live to learn more about the nearby landscape.

Flame ambassadors

Smokey Bear has been a prominent mascot for decades, helping to raise awareness about fire prevention. But Milligan and Schlickman believe Smokey could use a companion, one who could help promote "good" fires.

They've developed a few ideas, including "Grazie the Goat" and "Cinder the Coyote." A new billboard along Interstate-80 between Davis and Sacramento features "Burnie the Bobcat" and her slogan: "Only you can decide our fiery future."

Milligan and Schlickman said perhaps Burnie can help send a new message to the public that many landscapes across the state are fire-prone and fire-adapted and actually need fire to thrive.

"The idea of preventing fire has its place, we're not trying to get rid of that, but there's also a broader range of messaging that we would like to get out there; that fire is something that many species need, and it can foster better ecosystems," Milligan said. "Trying to stop fires all around in landscapes designed for fire, just doesn't work."

Both Milligan and Schlickman have participated in controlled burns with local fire agencies as well as cultural burns with local tribes, including the Yocha Dehe Wintun Nation, in recent months. Schlickman is also trained as a certified prescribed fire crew member. They hope that this project will lead to creating a national good fire campaign. Schlickman said they're in the process of exploring funding opportunities and are interested in working with fire-prone communities and prescribed burn associations in the greater Sacramento region to refine their mascots and messaging.

"We're also both interested in doing more on-the-ground fire work—learning how to approach fire lighting in ecologically and culturally sensitive ways, and how cooperative burning groups emerge and develop over time," Schlickman said.

There will be a free opening event at the museum on

Jan. 28 from 3-5:30 p.m. PST. Learn more about the exhibit at www.pyrofutures.com. — UC Agriculture and Natural Resources



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Answering the cattle nutrition protein question

Knowing exactly how beef cattle utilize protein is important to answering many nutrition questions producers and industry nutritionists pose to Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service specialists like Jason Smith, Ph.D.

Smith, an AgriLife Extension beef cattle nutritionist and associate professor in the Texas A&M College of Agriculture and Life Sci-

ences Department of Animal Science, works one-on-one with producers, AgriLife Extension county agents and other beef industry stakeholders throughout the High Plains of Texas.

One of his primary focus areas is to identify opportunities and conduct the applied research necessary to develop solutions to problems producers face.

Protein nutrition is one of those areas. He hopes to empower producers with the ability to make decisions that optimize cattle productivity, are economically advantageous and promote environmental stewardship.

Protein utilization by cattle

"For years, we have had

a good appreciation for the concept that cattle utilize different protein fractions to different degrees due to the rumen environment but have historically been limited in our ability to reliably predict the site and extent of protein digestion," Smith said.

"Making strategic, informed decisions and recommendations involving protein nutrition requires

us to predict how and where the animal will digest and utilize protein," he said. "Recognizing our previous limitations, filling that knowledge gap became a critical step necessary to help producers and nutritionists meet the nutrient requirements of cattle."

"Our latest research is making us rethink the values traditionally assigned to some of our major protein ingredients," Smith said. "We need to rethink how we measure or estimate those values. Fortunately, this project allowed our team to develop prediction equations for producers and nutritionists to use that are both highly accurate and precise."

The research needed to address this industrywide problem was partly funded by the Texas Cattle Feeders Association and conducted at the joint Texas A&M AgriLife and USDA's Agricultural Research Service (ARS) research feedyard and metabolism laboratory in Bushland, TX. The team is in the process of publishing the results and has already presented their findings at several major meetings, which have been well received by the industry.

The protein availability question

Smith said he often receives questions not being answered by others at this time—there's a void in the information—and he strives to help answer these questions.

"Protein is one of those areas where we need more information to answer questions that pertain to feeding cattle," he said. "Not all proteins fed to beef cattle are treated the same in the rumen, and how they are utilized by the animal influences far more than just the amino acids they supply to the animal. Before answering many of these questions with more certainty, we knew we needed to better understand the site and extent to which protein is digested. This was a critical first step for our group."

Over the past three years, he has collaborated with research colleagues in Texas A&M AgriLife Research and within the Department of Animal Science, as well as with ARS, to generate science-based answers and bring solutions back to those asking the questions.

Other AgriLife Research members of the team from the Department of Animal Science include Vinícius Gouvêa, DVM, Ph.D., assistant professor and ruminant nutritionist; Tryon Wickersham, Ph.D., professor and animal nutritionist; and Luis Tedeschi, Ph.D., professor and animal nutritionist. From the USDA-ARS Livestock Nutrient Management Research unit at Bushland, researchers include Matt Beck, Ph.D., research animal scientist, and Terra

Thompson, Ph.D., research soil scientist.

This study complements the work of Wickersham in protein nutrition and nitrogen metabolism, of Gouvêa in beef cattle nutrition and feeding management, Tedeschi in nutrition modeling, and work by Beck in environmental impact.

Research findings

The research team completed a series of experiments over the past three years that allowed them to not only evaluate the individual protein fractions and their availability to cattle for 18 common feedstuffs, but also to predict them using simple nutrient composition provided by routine feed analyses, Smith said.

"We've also begun to conduct some testing to better understand the economic and environmental consequences of under and overfeeding protein to cattle," he said.

The research will ultimately allow producers and nutritionists to make more strategic supplementation decisions, formulate rations more precisely, and make more informed ingredient purchasing decisions.

"Ultimately, we're trying to help producers and nutritionists achieve the optimal balance between productivity, economics and environmental stewardship. This work will help us to do that."

The research is an example of the effort to answer more than just scenario-dependent questions, but to provide broader solutions to a greater area of concern within the industry.

Part of that effort is training graduate students like Jarret Proctor and Nate Long, who both work at Bushland, to become tomorrow's nutritionists and AgriLife Extension personnel. Smith said these students are being trained in a unique way by working in this integrated AgriLife Extension-based applied research field.

"We are using translational research to build a foundation of scientific knowledge but also sharpen it with experiential on-the-ground learning by solving real-world problems," he said. "These students are working with producers to develop solutions to the problems that they face. The findings of their work are enhancing their ability to do so."

Smith said the team will continue to refine the process and actively work to further improve the understanding of how feedstuffs interact with the animal to meet its nutrient requirements and to develop estimates that can quickly and economically be incorporated into current laboratory tests. — **Texas A&M AgriLife Extension**

NDSU and SDSU extensions will host alternative beef cow systems symposium

The Dakota Alternative Beef Cow Systems Symposium will provide up-to-date research and information about alternative production practices.

Farmers and ranchers interested in expanding their cow herd or considering alternative production practices due to limited perennial pastures and rangeland are the target audience for the Dakota Alternative Beef Cow Systems Symposium, a joint meeting between North Dakota State University (NDSU) Extension and South Dakota State University (SDSU) Extension.

This one-day event is

scheduled for Feb. 6 at the Huron Event Center in Huron, SD, and Feb. 7 at the Jamestown Civic Center in Jamestown, ND. The symposium occurs from 10 a.m. to 3 p.m. CST each day. The Feb. 7 event will also be available as a live webinar for those unable to attend.

The event will provide the most up-to-date research and information on feeding strategies to replace forage, creep-feeding calves in confinement systems, alternative grazing strategies that increase adaptability, and the tradeoffs of alternative cow-calf systems compared to perennial pasture-based cow-calf systems.

"Perennial grass pastures and rangeland in many parts of the northern Plains have been converted into cropland for corn and soybean production, limiting pasture availability in many areas," said Zac Carlson, Extension beef cattle specialist. "Devising strategies to overcome these barriers and finding alternative solutions can help some producers expand or even establish a cow-calf enterprise."

The cost of the event is \$25 per person and includes the option to attend in-person at either of the two locations or remotely on Feb. 7. The registration fee includes a copy of the

symposium recording. To register for an in-person event or webinar, visit nds.u/ag/beef-cow-systems. Participants must register by Jan. 31 to attend in-person. Those participating remotely will need a computer and internet connection to participate in the webinar.

For more information, contact Warren Rusche, assistant professor and SDSU Extension feedlot specialist, at 605-688-5452 or warren.rusche@sdstate.edu, or Zac Carlson, assistant professor and NDSU Extension beef cattle specialist at 701-219-4094 or zachary.e.carlson@nds.u.edu. — **NDSU and SDSU extensions**



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Study confirms California forests are healthier when burned or thinned

A 20-year experiment in the Sierra Nevada of California confirms that different forest management techniques—prescribed burning, restoration thinning or a combination of both—are effective at reducing the risk of catastrophic wildfire in California.

These treatments also improve forest health, making trees more resilient to stressors like drought and bark beetles, and they do not negatively impact plant or wildlife biodiversity within individual tree stands, the research found. The findings of the experiment, called the Fire Surrogate Study, are published online in the journal Ecological Applications.

“The research is pretty darn clear that these treatments are effective—very effective,” said study lead author Scott Stephens, a professor of fire science at the University of California (UC), Berkeley. “I hope this lets people know that there is great hope in doing these treatments at scale, without any negative consequences.”

In 2022, California announced a strategic plan for expanding the use of prescribed fire to 400,000 acres annually by 2025. However, the use of beneficial fire continues to be hindered by multiple factors, including the lack of a trained workforce, the need for specific weather conditions for burning and fears about potential risks.

This study shows that restoration thinning is also a viable option for forest management and can be used in tandem with beneficial fire without harming forest health or biodiversity.

“Our findings show that there’s not just one solution—there are multiple things that you can do to impact the risk of catastrophic fire,” said study co-author Ariel Roughton, research station manager at Berkeley Forests. “Folks can choose from

different combinations of treatments that might fit their needs, and we can show them how those treatments might impact things like wildfire behavior, tree growth and carbon holding in their forests.”

Over the past two decades, Stephens and other researchers at Berkeley Forests have used prescribed burning, restoration thinning or a combination of both to treat plots of land at Blodgett Forest Research Station, a 4,000-acre experimental forest located about 65 miles northeast of Sacramento on the unceded lands of the Nisenan peoples.

The Fire Surrogate Study was one of 13 studies across the U.S. first launched in 1999 with funding from the U.S. Joint Fire Science Program. Its aim was to study whether the two treatments could mimic the beneficial impacts of lightning fires and Indigenous burning practices on California’s forests, which have become dense and overgrown after a century of logging and fire suppression.

“Prescribed fire and restoration thinning are both surrogates for wildfire, a key process that happened frequently in California before European colonization,” Stephens said. “The impetus of this study was: If you’re going to implement these treatments at a large scale, is there anything that’s going to be lost?”

The study created nine experimental plots and three control plots at Blodgett. Three of the experimental plots were managed only using prescribed burns; three burns occurred over the course of 20 years. Three other experimental plots were first thinned and then burned, and the final three were treated only with restoration thinning. The control plots were left to grow without human interference except continued fire suppression.

At the end of the 20-year period, the researchers surveyed the vegetation in each plot and used computational modeling to estimate how many trees were likely to survive wildfire. They found that all three types of experimental plots were significantly more resilient to wildfire than the control plots, showing an 80% likelihood that at least 80% of trees would survive.

They also calculated the “index of competition,” a measure of how strongly trees must compete for resources like sunlight, water and soil nutrients. By removing excess trees and vegetation, thinning and burning both limited the amount of competition between trees, making them less vulnerable to stressors, like drought and bark beetles.

However, the plots that were treated with a combination of thinning and fire had the best index of competition, suggesting that they would be the most resilient to the impacts of climate change.

“When you combine thinning with fire, you’re able to modify all different levels of the forest structure, and it speeds up the timeline for achieving a more resilient structure,” Roughton said.

Restoration thinning can also provide financial benefits: Often, larger trees can be sold to sawmills, and the proceeds can be used to help offset the cost of forest management. Over the course of 20 years, the treatments at Blodgett were entirely paid for by revenue from timber.

“When I go to Sacramento and talk about (forest management) with legislators, the first question they always ask is about cost,” Stephens said. “People in the state government are telling us that they can’t be the sole source support for this work. That’s why the economics are so important.”

In September 2022, the forests at Blodgett were subjected to a real-life test: On the morning of Sept. 9, 2022, the Mosquito Fire breached

the north side of the property, burning approximately 300 acres before it was contained two days later.

One of the study’s control plots was located directly in the path of the blaze, and more than 60% of the trees in this plot were completely scorched. However, neighboring experimental plots that had been treated with prescribed burns served as “fuel breaks,” burning less hot than the control and acting as staging areas for firefighters.

“We think that, overall, our management actions, coupled with the weather, did have a pretty big impact on the behavior of the fire,” Roughton said.

The researchers have received a four-year grant from the Joint Fire Science Program to continue the Fire Surrogate Project. With the help of the grant, they have established a new control plot to replace the one that burned and plan to apply a fourth fire to the experimental burn-only plots.

They are also collaborating with the United Auburn Indian Community to reestablish Indigenous cultural burning at Blodgett.

“We want to be part of the solution, and that’s part of our mission at Blodgett,” Roughton said. “We hope that by doing these studies and bringing folks here to see the effects of the different treatments, they will take that back and apply it to the land that they’re going to be managing.”

This project was funded by the U.S. Joint Fire Science Program, and it has received support from the California Fourth Climate Change Assessment, the McIntire-Stennis Program, the California Greenhouse Gas Reduction Fund, and the UC Office of the President’s UC Laboratory Fees Research Program. Smart Practices and Architecture for Prescribed Fires in California was also important to keeping this project active. — UC Agriculture and Natural Resources

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YOUTH OPPORTUNITIES

(In an effort to serve the next generation of livestock producers, WLJ's Youth Opportunities calendar lists internship and scholarship information for agricultural- and livestock-focused students, listed by application deadline. If you have an internship or scholarship to announce, please email it to

editorial@wlj.net.)

Jan. 15 – The Sandhills Task Force's Ranch Internship Program is now accepting applications for summer 2024. The program is open to those older than 19 years old who have an interest in hands-on ranching. Details: sandhillstaskforce.org/ranch-internship.

HOOVES & HORNS BY A.W. ERWIN



"Have yew priced a T-Bone or a RibEye lately?? That's the real reason Extraterrestrials are foolin' with cattle."

Partnering with NRCS for sustainable ranching

For over three decades, the Kipps have been safeguarding land in Montana, collaborating with the USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS).

"The ground was pretty poor and the water nonexistent," Joe Kipp recalls, explaining how they had inherited a "dust bowl" along with some old, outdated water systems that couldn't be used.

Undeterred, the Kipps reached out to the NRCS as well as the Blackfeet Nation for assistance.

With their help, they were able to install stock water systems and cross fencing over time. These additions, along with a grazing plan, have transformed the land, which now serves as a productive summer pasture. The first project completed was to establish boundary fencing around the property so that Joe and his wife, Kathy, could keep stray cattle from grazing their land.

Water is scarce in the area, so the installation of cross-fencing also required water developments to be set up. All of these improvements collectively support rotational grazing across the four pastures on their property.

In 2017, NRCS Civil Engineer Meagan Heinen began collaborating with the Kipps, alongside NRCS Area Resource Conservationist Stacy Denny Eneboe and local field office staff. Together, they prioritized critical issues such as water scarcity and grass growth, aiming to foster resilience, even in challenging circumstances like the Category 3 drought experienced in 2022.

Preserving sacred lands

For Joe, also known as Kyiyo Tokon (Bear Head), the land holds immense spiritual and ancestral significance. As a fourth-generation survivor

of the Bear River/Marias River Massacre, his connection to the Blackfeet People's history and cultural heritage is deeply rooted.

During World War II, a society known as the War Mothers was formed, which he says provided a place for people with loved ones serving in the military overseas to bring offerings and transport them in a wagon to a butte, indicated by Joe as a ridge in the distance. At the top of the butte, there was a special place where they would fast and pray.

"It was a very sacred spot," he says, "there's sacred sites all over."

The Kipps' dedication to maintaining and nurturing this sacred land runs deep, reflecting a commitment to preserving their heritage and the environment, while keeping in mind future generations,

including Joe and Kathy's children and grandchildren.

Maintaining tribal-owned property has not always been easy. Pointing out the sheer expanse of the land with such limited access to resources, Kathy describes the hardships previous Blackfeet members faced here.

"Back then they did everything on horseback. How could you survive on this and go and get groceries in town? How are you going to go and get to a job," she questions. "You'd have to leave and go somewhere and maybe come back on the weekend. It was just almost impossible."

At one point, it had become impossible for the former Blackfeet family who had worked the land here.

"Actually, the place we're at now," she says, "they are ancestors of Joe's." His family had owed a grocery bill in town at a local mercantile. Unable to pay it, the store owner took their land.

"The land is lost in different ways just because people are trying to survive," she says.

It's understandable then, why their cattle operation is so incredibly important to the Kipps who feel a sense of responsibility to make sure the land remains within their family and the Blackfeet Nation.

Water development

Although they've made great strides in improving the land, one major concern that remains is access to water for their cattle. Recognizing the need for sustainable water sources, the Kipps have worked closely with NRCS to address water scarcity on their property.

This is especially important as Joe and Kathy hope to increase the amount of cattle they run.

Previously installed spring developments were found to be low producing and snow-melt fed, according to Heinen, who joined forces with the Kipps about six years ago. "Depending on the snow-pack, they could be dry by the end of July," Heinen says.

Through the NRCS's Environmental Quality Incentives

Program, a water well and a solar pumping plant were installed in 2018.

In 2021, the Kipp's began an additional project. "We were finding out the water wasn't keeping up with what the grass could support," says Heinen. "Our goal was to help them look into how we could improve water distribution and water quantity and work towards them being able to completely use their rotational pasture setup in the most effective manner."

They've found the solar pumping plant has allowed for more efficient and effective water distribution through a gravity-fed system, ensuring water availability in various pastures while reducing energy consumption.

"Without power nearby, we've had to rely on solar capacity," says Heinen who explains that to prepare for cloudy weather when solar production isn't optimum, they store at least three days of water needs in a buried storage tank.

The Kipps have also used the terrain's hills and elevation to their benefit, pumping the water uphill. "When the sun's out, it's doing the work of lifting the water. And when the sun's not out, we've stored that water at a higher elevation which creates on-demand pressure to service drinking tanks downhill, so the buried storage tank becomes our system supply and they're replenished by the pump when it can run," Heinen says.

For Heinen, the ideal scenario would be to have a reliable water supply where and when it's needed. "We're trying to increase that flexibility which increases their bottom line and increases the health and productivity of the land," she says. "It's really one of NRCS's goals of protecting and enhancing the natural resources and intersecting with the producer's goals."

"This is to help us be sustainable," Joe explains. "It gives us a leg up on the environment to be able to collect this water and disperse it to the cattle as needed." Their cattle will drink out of the tank before they drink out of a spring, because it is colder, fresher and they don't have to

walk over marshy ground.

"Cows are just like people," adds Kathy, explaining how the cows preferred going where the grass was greener. Prior to installing the water systems, they had to move their minerals and salt around to get their cattle to graze areas further from water, so other areas could recover. Now, with the help of rotational grazing thanks to cross fencing and the new water systems, Kathy says the pastures recover a lot faster.

"You don't see it grazed out around the water holes and the well spots."

Joe and Kathy have engaged in the NRCS Conservation Stewardship Program for five years, which has helped them take their management up a notch and include practices from rotational grazing, manure sampling and analysis, taking photographs to monitor restored grasslands, fencing, and water management.

"It's helped us to be able to protect the land in the long run because we are taking better care of it."


The Kipp's holistic approach aligns with their deep respect for nature and their ancestral traditions.

"To be a good role model in our community, you can't preach," Joe says. Instead, they are hoping the results their neighbors are seeing will speak for themselves.

But their commitment extends beyond the needs of running cattle. They recognize the importance of preserving the land for the diverse wildlife that depend on it, like the elk, antelope, sharp-tailed grouse and bears.

The Kipps have also been seeing a surplus in plant growth, like beautiful purple crocus, buttercups, sunflowers, shooting stars, and a variety of sagebrush vegetation. Kathy often gathers plants when she's out riding that can be made into medicines they use throughout the year. She loves working the land and seeing how it's improved in the last several years.


"I believe that the land is native land, and we need to take care of it because it's taken care of us," she says. — **USDA NRCS**



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CE	BW	WW	YW	MM	REA	MARB	CHBS
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UPS ENTICE 2137 ET • LOT 218





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Tips for producers who are unable to manage cows on pastures

Cows raised in confinement require more human capital than those raised on pastures, according to the experts at Kansas State (K-State) University's Beef Cattle Institute, who spoke about this topic on a recent "Cattle Chat" podcast. Joining the crew for this discussion was K-State beef cattle extension specialist Jason Warner.

Warner said confinement "is anything that is in a fence or boundary, but often we think of it as cows in a dry lot or barn." He said the reason producers opt for this system is often because of the price of land.

"High land costs are prohibitive for expansion, and in some areas, traditional grazing pastures have been turned into row crop production," Warner said.

K-State agricultural economist Dustin Pendell agreed with Warner and added: "When you are competing for land that is used to grow corn and soybeans, even if it is marginal pastureland, it is hard to pencil out."

Pendell said that producers who do raise their cows in confinement need to be aware of the higher labor expense compared to the cows raised out on pastures.

"Someone has got to be there to feed the cattle and there is a labor cost tied to that," Pendell said.

Feed is another additional expense that comes with maintaining cattle in a restricted area, said K-State beef cattle nutritionist Philip Lancaster.

"The feed costs will be

higher in a confinement situation," Lancaster said. "However, by limit-feeding a higher energy diet, producers can reduce the amount of forage needed and thereby reduce the amount of nutrients needed to maintain those cows."

The other management difference between cows maintained on pastures versus confinement relates to sanitation, said K-State veterinarian Bob Larson.

"Calves need to be born in a sanitary environment," Larson said. "Producers must have a plan in place to deal with the mud and dirt because young calves are the most susceptible to a disease challenge that comes from an unsanitary environment." — **K-State Research and Extension**

STORY SHORTS

BLM conducts analysis on weed control

The Bureau of Land Management (BLM) has concluded a comprehensive environmental impact assessment on seven herbicide active ingredients for managing noxious weeds and invasive species across 79 million acres of public lands in the western U.S. "One of the BLM's highest priorities is to promote the health of our public lands, and one of the greatest obstacles to achieving this goal is the rapid expansion of noxious and invasive weeds," said Sharif Branham, BLM assistant director for Resources and Planning. The agency's consideration of new ingredients, such as Indaziflam, registered by the Environmental Protection Agency, underscores the ongoing efforts to enhance herbicide effectiveness and combat potential resistance in invasive plant communities. BLM conducted a virtual public meeting during the draft environmental impact statement process and is available at tinyurl.com/mrty5tnj. The BLM expects to publish a record of decision regarding this proposal in February.

NoDak Meats opens facility in ND

NoDak Meats LLC marked the opening of its new meat processing facility in Steele, ND, with a ribbon-cutting ceremony on Jan. 8. The launch of this facility was made possible through a \$623,833 loan provided by the Lewis and Clark Development Group. The funds were secured through a grant from the USDA's Rural Development's Meat and Poultry Intermediary Lending Program, designed to support the financing of start-ups, expansions and operations in meat and poultry processing establishments. "The opening of NoDak Meats in Steele is a perfect example of how the administration's priorities and our federal resources are investing in and benefiting our North Dakota communities, small, rural businesses, and the entire food supply chain—from producer to consumer," said Erin Oban, USDA state director of Rural Development.

FSIS issues two food recalls

USDA's Food Safety and Inspection Service (FSIS) announced two recalls for kielbasa and ready-to-eat charcuterie meat products. On Jan. 5, FSIS announced that Wisconsin-based Salm Partners LLC recalled approximately 133,039 pounds of ready-to-eat turkey kielbasa products that may be contaminated with bone fragments. The 13-oz vacuum-sealed packages are labeled as "Parkview Turkey Polska Kielbasa" with P-32009 and "USE BY APR 24 24" or "USE BY APR 27 24" printed on the package. These items were shipped to retail locations nationwide. On Jan. 3, FSIS announced the recall of approximately 11,097 pounds of Busseto Foods brand ready-to-eat charcuterie meat products that may be contaminated with salmonella. The products made by New Jersey-based Fratelli Beretta USA, Inc., bear the "Busseto Foods Charcuterie Sampler Prosciutto, Sweet Sopressata, and Dry Coppa" label with lot code L075330300 and "BEST IF USED BY APR 27 24." The products are sold as a twin pack with two 9-oz. packages. The products subject to recall bear the establishment number "EST. 7543B" inside the USDA mark of inspection and "EST. #47967" printed with the lot and date codes. These items were shipped to Sam's Club distribution centers in Georgia, Illinois, Indiana, Minnesota, North Carolina, Ohio, Oklahoma and Texas. Consumers who have purchased these products are urged not to consume them. These products should be thrown away or returned to the place of purchase.

Nebraska Beef charged with violations

Following a federal investigation into a severe hand injury suffered by an employee at an Omaha, NE, beef processing plant in June 2023, more than a dozen severe and willful violations were identified by Department of Labor (DOL) officials. DOL's Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) found that the worker, assisting a forklift operator at Nebraska Beef Ltd., had their fingertip caught in the forklift attachment, leading to a medically necessitated amputation three weeks later. OSHA revealed the company's failure to implement lock-out/tagout procedures for hydraulic dock plates, lack of safety protocols for material handling and exposure of workers to live electrical parts. Nebraska Beef Ltd. faces two willful and 11 serious violations, with proposed penalties amounting to \$274,569. Nebraska Beef Ltd. processes and distributes USDA-graded Prime, Choice and Select products for sale by grocery stores, club chains, wholesale distributors and restaurants.

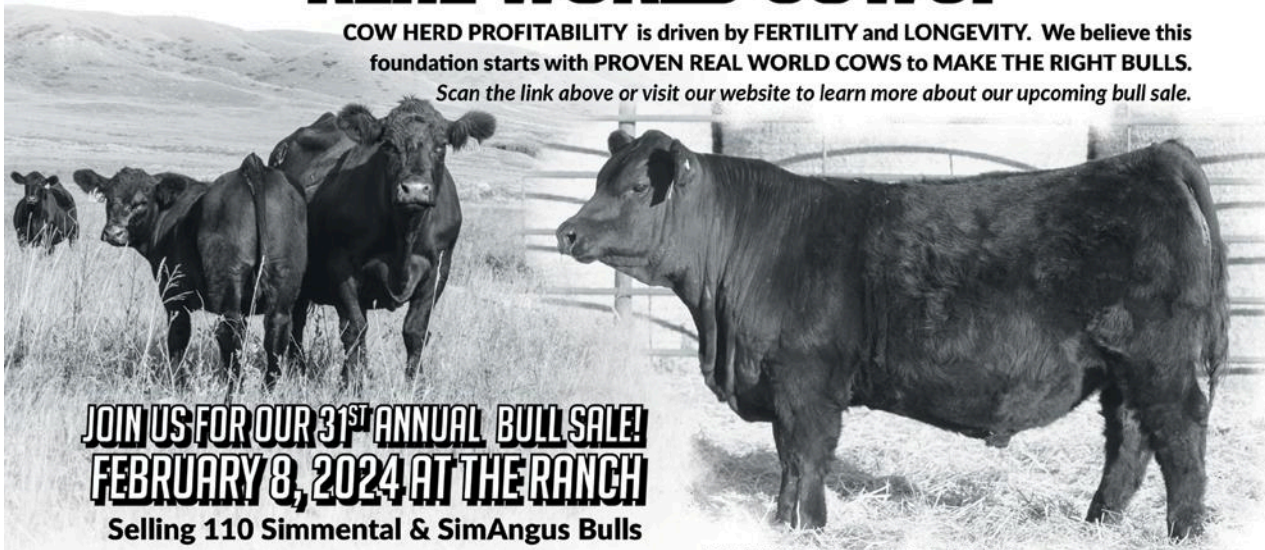
DOL recovers backpay for plant workers

The Department of Labor (DOL) has announced the recovery of \$230,000 in compensation for 545 workers at a Hastings, NE, meat processing plant who were denied payment for pre- and post-shift activities, including the time spent donning and removing protective gear and cleaning equipment. DOL's Wage and Hour Division investigation revealed that Noah's Ark Processors LLC failed to compensate workers for minutes spent on such tasks before and after their shifts in various plant areas. The violations occurred between Sept. 6, 2021, and Feb. 4, 2023. A consent judgment and order issued by U.S. District Court Judge John M. Gerrard on Dec. 21 mandates the meat processor to pay the owed amounts to workers and adhere to the Fair Labor Standards Act in the future.

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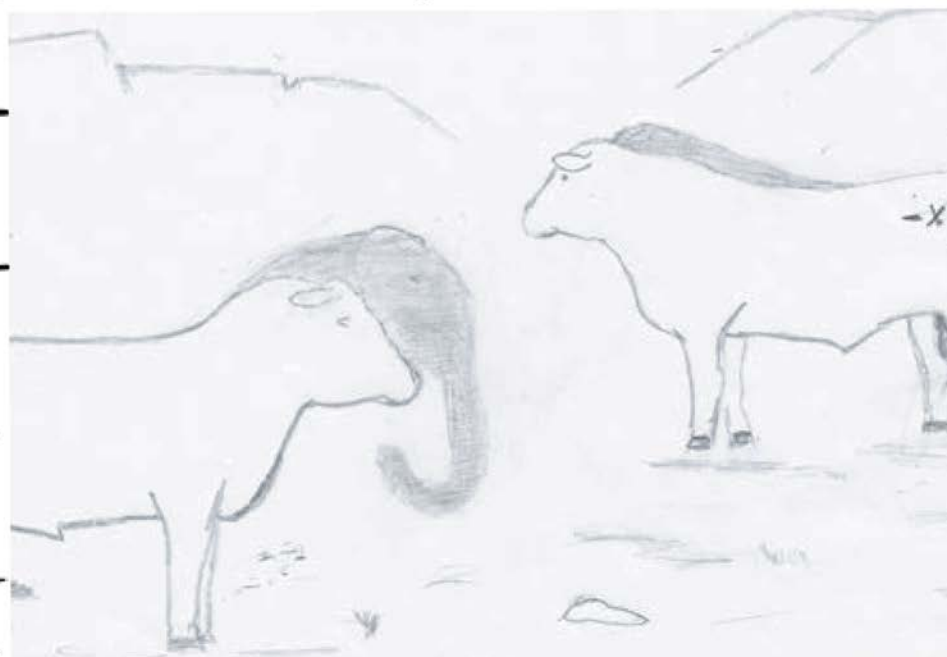


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MARKET NEWS

MARKET SITUATION REPORT
 WLJ compiles its market reports, ODJ stories and statistics from USDA and independent marketing organizations.

MARKET AT A GLANCE	This Week: 1/11/2024	Week Ago	Year Ago
Choice Fed Steers	174.87 ▼	174.98	157.31
CME Feeder Index	227.75 ▼	228.65	182.36
Boxed Beef Average	285.89 ▲	275.90	277.49
Average Dressed Steers	275.00 ▼	275.24	251.08
Live Slaughter Weight*	1,401 ▲	1,387	1,390
Weekly Slaughter**	556,000 ▲	508,000	563,000
Weekly Beef Production***	470.3 ▲	429.4	468.3
Hide/Offal Value	11.65 ▼	11.79	13.73
Corn Price	4.58 ▼	4.67	6.71

*Average weight for previous week. **Total slaughter for previous week. ***Estimated year-to-date figure in million pounds for previous week.

BEEF REPORT: Weekly Composite Boxed Beef												
WEEK ENDING	COMPREHENSIVE Loads/Price	PRIME Loads/Price	BRANDED Loads/Price	CHOICE Loads/Price	SELECT Loads/Price	UNGRADED Loads/Price						
January 5	6,134	280.10	186	316.97	1,070	288.57	1,925	279.29	641	259.95	2,312	244.36
December 29	5,400	282.61	161	313.76	993	291.08	1,579	283.74	605	257.93	2,063	239.89
December 22	6,811	282.44	238	315.71	1,188	293.90	2,053	284.11	742	258.65	2,590	241.55
December 15	7,399	282.36	207	317.30	1,288	292.61	2,343	284.22	864	259.67	2,697	238.51

CUTOUTS						FED BOXED BEEF					
DATE	CHOICE	SELECT	COW BEEF CUTOUT	50% LEAN	90% LEAN						
Jan 11	285.89	269.94	211.01	78.74	264.39						
Jan 10	283.07	266.94	211.88	73.61	267.00						
Jan 9	280.16	262.83	204.15	56.22	256.00						
Jan 8	278.83	259.36	206.05	60.55	255.12						
Jan 5	277.16	259.53	205.24	55.57	256.00						

CATTLE FUTURES: CME Live Cattle							
	1/5	1/8	1/9	1/10	1/11	High*	Low*
Feb.	17058	16950	17078	17075	17180	19633	15310
Apr.	17340	17303	17360	17368	17458	19975	16853
Jun.	17055	17035	17075	17110	17198	18270	16668
Aug.	17128	17080	17123	17163	17240	17255	17005

CATTLE FUTURES: CME Feeder Cattle							
	1/5	1/8	1/9	1/10	1/11	High*	Low*
Jan.	22313	22388	22378	22463	22628	26833	21280
Mar.	22415	22508	22488	22613	22740	25723	21608
Apr.	22978	23010	23035	23145	23273	24613	21920
May	23480	23460	23515	23625	23748	23758	22268

*High and low figures are for the life of the contract.

FED CATTLE TRADE	Head Count	Avg. Weight	Avg. Price
WEEKLY WEIGHTED AVERAGES			
Live FOB Steer	2,361	1,547	174.87
Live FOB Heifer	1,557	1,395	174.75
Dressed Del Steer	911	978	275.00
Dressed Del Heifer	14	841	275.00
SAME PERIOD LAST WEEK			
Live FOB Steer	4,170	1,541	174.98
Live FOB Heifer	990	1,388	175.00
Dressed Del Steer	2,893	935	275.24
Dressed Del Heifer	640	857	273.71
SAME PERIOD LAST YEAR			
Live FOB Steer	2,619	1,537	157.31
Live FOB Heifer	2,217	1,372	157.49
Dressed Del Steer	1,239	971	251.08
Dressed Del Heifer	74	853	251.00

NATIONAL WEEKLY FED BEEF SLAUGHTER VOLUME: JANUARY 7		
	Domestic	Imported
Forward Contract	25,489	2,677
Formula	238,889	955
Negotiated Cash	64,711	77
Negotiated Grid	49,520	321
Packer Owned	9,659	N/A
Total	388,268	4,030

SLAUGHTER FORWARD CONTRACTS		FORWARD BEEF SALES	
Delivery Month	Neg. Sales 0-21 days	Neg. Sales 21+ days	1,806
Jan. '24	116,686	684	
Feb. '24	90,350	3,584	
Mar. '24	113,931	60	
Apr. '24	149,292	5,482	
May. '24	46,420	92	

CANADIAN LIVESTOCK PRICES & FEDERAL INSPECTED SLAUGHTER FIGURES			
Alberta Direct Sales (4% shrink)	Price	Weekly Change	
Slaughter Steers, mostly Choice & Select 1-3, 1300-1500 lbs	N/A	N/A	
Slaughter Heifers, mostly Choice & Select 1-3, 1200-1400 lbs	N/A	N/A	
Ontario Auctions			
Slaughter Steers, mostly Choice & Select 1-3, 1300-1500 lbs	N/A	N/A	
Slaughter Heifers, mostly Choice & Select 1-3, 1200-1400 lbs	N/A	N/A	
Slaughter Cows, Cutter and Utility 1-3, 1100-1400 lbs	N/A	N/A	

*Price comparison from one week ago.

Average feeder cattle prices (CND) for week ending Friday, December 29, 2023				
Steers:	Alberta	Saskatchewan	Ontario	
501-600 lbs	N/A	N/A	N/A	
601-700 lbs	N/A	N/A	N/A	
701-800 lbs	N/A	N/A	N/A	
801-900 lbs	N/A	N/A	N/A	
Heifers:				
401-500 lbs	N/A	N/A	N/A	
501-600 lbs	N/A	N/A	N/A	
601-700 lbs	N/A	N/A	N/A	
701-800 lbs	N/A	N/A	N/A	

USDA MEXICO TO U.S. WEEKLY LIVESTOCK IMPORTS				
Feeder cattle imports weekly and yearly volume.				
Species	Current Week	Previous Week	Current Year-to-date	Previous Year-to-date
Feeder Steers	2,630	4,592	2,630	4,394

USDA WEEKLY IMPORTED FEEDER CATTLE			
January 11, 2024			
Mexico to United States Feeder Cattle Import Summary			
Receipts EST: 5,200	Week Ago Act: 500	Year Ago Act: 6,000	
Columbus, NM		Santa Teresa, NM	
Compared to Tuesday, steer calves and yearlings sold 1.00 higher. Heifers steady. Trade active, demand good. Supply consisted of steers and spayed heifers weighing 300-600 lbs.		Compared to Tuesday, steer calves and yearlings sold 1.00 higher. Heifers steady. Trade active, demand good. Supply consisted of steers and spayed heifers weighing 300-600 lbs.	
Feeder heifers: Medium and large 1&2		Feeder heifers: Medium and large 1&2	
300-400 lbs	225-235	300-400 lbs	225-235
400-500 lbs	215-225	400-500 lbs	215-225
500-600 lbs	205-215	500-600 lbs	205-215
Feeder steers: Medium and large 1&2		Feeder steers: Medium and large 1&2	
300-400 lbs	273-283	300-400 lbs	273-283
400-500 lbs	253-263	400-500 lbs	253-263
500-600 lbs	228-238	500-600 lbs	228-238

(slide 10 cents on steers and heifers basis 300 lbs. All sales fob port of entry.)

Selected Auction Week Ending January 11, 2024										
Feeder prices for steers & heifers reflect medium and large 1 cattle, unless otherwise noted; * Indicates medium and large 1-2										
DATE	MARKET	200-300 lb.	300-400 lb.	400-500 lb.	500-600 lb.	600-700 lb.	700-800 lb.	800 lb. -up	SLAUGHTER COWS	PAIRS
		SLAUGHTER BULLS		REPLACEMENTS						
January 5	Blackfoot, ID	N/A	230-285	250-320	220-315	205-275	190-243	189-221	86-101	1,400-1,850
January 4	Burley, ID	404						167-187	94-110	
No report available Emmett, ID										
January 6	Eugene, OR	522	160-210*	200-225*	190-216*	186-205*			88-109	500-1,630
January 8	Madras, OR	1,893	300-347	316-357	280-315	251-279	218-234	210-220	83-114.50	
No report available Vale, OR										
January 8	Davenport, WA	244	200	160-185	192.50-208	150-202.50	142.50-182.50	84-157	51-111	
January 4	Toppenish, WA	1,240			130-196	20-170	137.50-162.50		82-110.50	1,200-1,575
No report available										
January 4	Orland, CA	3,372		275-380	250-329	210-278	175-240	170-227	100-119	3,300
January 5	Escalon, CA	N/A		255-335	230-284	190-255	155-227	150-213	95-125	2,650
No report available Famoso, CA										
No report available Galt, CA										
January 9	Turlock, CA	621		280-325	256.25-280	200-227.50	185-210	100-185	87-116	
No report available Salina, UT										
January 8	Iowa	23,696	322.50-325	278-371	250-358	221-315	230-284.25	200-257.50	171-240.50	80-118
January 9	Miles City, MT	2,656	292.50	239-307.50	232-285	215-281	203-267.50	192-235	174.50-214.50	74-136
January 10	Bassett, NE	3,300		338-367.50	312-348.50	282-320.50	252-289	235.50-243.50	215	73-103
January 6	Ericson, NE	2,710		299-313	280-309	254.50-281	243-262			78-110
January 9	Imperial, NE	1,502		347	320-332	315-331	258-304	220-260	212.25-235	1,600
January 3	Kearney, NE	4,800		294-310	263-280	229-259.50	215-235.75	198		
January 5	Lexington, NE	3,416		337.50-362	315-347.50	266-319.50	251-280	237-243	224.50-227.50	
January 4	Ogallala, NE	4,686		300-347	316-357	280-315	251-279	209-227.50		
January 4	Valentine, NE	2,190		301-352	270-320	230-274	222-239			
January 5	Herreid, SD	2,402								
January 10	Torrington, WY	6,380								
January 4	Willcox, AZ	1,047								
January 8	Colorado	4,986								
January 8	Loma, CO	2,488								
January 10	Dodge City, KS	760								
January 11	Pratt, KS	577								
January 11	Salina, KS	1,311								
January 11	Clovis, NM	2,497								
January 9	El Reno, OK	4,000								
January 10	McAlester, OK	980								
January 9	Oklahoma City, OK	14,353								
January 5	Cuero, TX	1,111								
January 4	Dalhart, TX	3,189								
January 4	San Angelo, TX	807								
January 4	Tulia, TX	696								
No report available Alabama										
January 8	Lexington, KY	1,871								
January 8	Joplin, MO	8,231								
January 8	Tennessee	4,846								
January 8	Virginia	176								

CANADA										
January 10	Lethbridge, Alberta	276								110-127.50

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Are you on offense or defense in 2024?

The majority of the cow-calf sector has been on the defense for the past two to three years due to adverse weather and production cost conditions. Widespread drought has forced significant herd liquidation and resulted in additional feed and other production costs.

It appears that the beef cow herd has decreased by roughly 11% since the last cyclical peak in 2019 and has decreased perhaps 6% in just the last two years due to drought. USDA will release the Jan. 1 cattle inventory numbers on Jan. 31 and confirm herd changes in 2023.

The drought resulted in record high hay prices in 2022 with only slight decreases in 2023. High prices for supplement feeds, fertilizer, fuel and other production inputs have added to the cost challenges.

Going into 2024, production costs have eased somewhat and drought conditions have improved in many re-

gions, though considerable drought remains around the country. Many regions that have less drought or are recently removed from drought still need time for forage recovery or, particularly important in many areas, water recovery.

With considerable uncertainty remaining about moisture and forage conditions for the coming growing season, many producers are logically taking a very cautious approach to animal stocking. Restocking drought-reduced cow herds will be a slower process in many situations.

On the other hand, some producers will be in a position to be more aggressive in 2024. Higher cattle prices and some moderation in production costs means higher profit potential and incentives to increase calf production. For some producers, this means retaining heifers or purchasing breeding females to restock to full

production levels. Other producers, who are at full production capacity, can focus on maximizing calf production and sales in response to growing market incentives to increase cattle and beef production.

Cattle markets began transitioning in 2023. Though herd liquidation continued, beef production began to drop from the record 2022 level. Beef production will continue declining in 2024 and beyond. Beef cow herd liquidation will likely slow and perhaps stop in 2024—though there is little chance of any significant rebuild for a year or more. It will, of course, depend on weather and forage conditions in the coming year.

The heifer retention needed to rebuild the herd will squeeze feeder supplies, feedlot production, cattle slaughter and beef production going forward. However, it is unclear how ag-

gressive that process will be. Attempts for a faster herd rebuild will provoke bigger impact on cattle and beef prices, while a slower herd expansion will be less dramatic but will sustain tighter cattle and beef supplies, and higher prices, longer.

In general, cattle markets are encouraging more aggressive production. Individually, cattle producers may be able to respond immediately or may be forced to remain on the defensive due to physical or financial reasons. In all cases, pro-

ducers should be thinking about how and when they can go on offense to take advantage of current and future market opportunities. — **Derrell S. Peel, Oklahoma State University Extension livestock marketing specialist**

Cold weather expected to diminish cattle performance

MARKETS (from page 1)

- Formula net purchases: \$277.22.
- Forward contract net purchases: \$290.50.
- Negotiated grid net purchases: \$276.78.

Slaughter through Thursday totaled about 424,000 head. Projected total slaughter for a week earlier is 556,000 head. Actual slaughter for the week ending Dec. 30 was estimated at 500,521 head. The average steer dressed weight was 941 lbs., 1 lb. below the prior week.

Due to inclement weather from the first big winter storm of the year, several packing plants canceled kill shifts on Tuesday afternoon, which may result in a lighter total slaughter over the week. Tyson and Cargill suspended operations in Kansas after many plant workers were stranded Monday on highways or spent the night at the packing plants.

"This coming week will feature a full slaughter week," the Cattle Report wrote in its Thursday comments. "The slaughter levels will be important to maintaining stability of price at both the feedlot and retail level for beef."

Boxed beef prices are back trading higher on account of slower slaughter speeds. The Choice cutout gained about \$10 to close at 285.89, and the Select cutout gained a little over \$11 to close at \$269.94.

"The new year will bring the end meats and hamburger back into the sales promotions as winter time eating of beef begins," the Cattle Report said. "Middle meats will weaken as cold weather sets in and consumers move to roasts and hamburger."

Early analyst reports project the upcoming Cattle on Feed report to show Jan. 1 cattle on feed higher by 2%,

placements down to 97.9% of last year and marketings down to 99.4% of last year.

The biannual Cattle inventory report is projected to show a 2% decrease in all cattle and calves on Jan. 1. All classes of cattle are expected to decline in numbers.

Feeder cattle

"Arctic weather is headed to the Plains over this weekend," the Cattle Report said. "Sub-zero temperatures will plague cattle and people on top of recent snows."

Weight losses are reported in all areas, with many cattle down 20-30 lbs., the report said.

Feeder cattle futures made some gains over the week. The January contract gained \$1.60 to close at \$226.27, and the March contract gained \$1.75 to close at \$227.40.

The CME Feeder Cattle Index lost 90 cents to close at \$227.75.

Corn futures were lower over the week, with the March contract down 9 cents to \$4.57 and the May contract down 10 cents to \$4.69.

"The softness in corn markets is also helping create overall market firmness through Thursday morning, but there remains uncertainty given the recent volatility in stock markets, and the impact of inflation rating reports impacting the overall economy and thus, long-term beef demand," DTN said.

Colorado: Winter Livestock in La Junta sold 4,196 head on Tuesday. Compared to a year earlier, feeder steers under 450 lbs. sold \$10 higher while steers over 450 lbs. sold unevenly steady. Feeder heifers sold mostly \$2-11 higher across all weight classes. Benchmark steers averaging 766 lbs. sold from \$219.50-228.25, averaging \$227.22.

Kansas: Winter Livestock

in Dodge City sold 665 head on Wednesday. There was no trend to a week earlier due to the winter storm at the beginning of the week. Benchmark steers averaging 776 lbs. sold for an average of \$226.25.

Missouri: Joplin Regional Stockyards in Carthage sold 6,500 head on Monday. Compared to a week earlier, feeder steers sold \$2-9 lower. Feeder heifers sold \$6-11 lower. Benchmark steers averaging 773 lbs. sold from \$214-218, averaging \$215.52.

Nebraska: Tri-State Livestock in McCook sold 1,265 head on Monday. There were no recent sales for an accurate comparison. Benchmark steers averaging 790 lbs. sold between \$220-225, averaging \$223.48.

New Mexico: Roswell Livestock in Roswell sold 1,517 head on Monday. There were no recent sales for an accurate comparison. Benchmark steers averaging 790 lbs. sold between \$165-213, averaging \$200.94.

Oklahoma: Oklahoma National Stockyards sold 14,500 head on Monday. Compared to the last sale on Dec. 19, feeder steers and heifers sold \$2-5 lower at the mid-session. Steer and heifer calves sold mostly \$3-8 lower. Benchmark steers averaging 764 lbs. sold from \$214.50-223, averaging \$220.39.

South Dakota: Sioux Falls Regional Cattle in Worthing sold 4,412 head on Monday. Compared to the previous auction, light steers 450-550 lbs. sold steady to \$1 higher, with instances up to \$7 higher. Steers 600-700 lbs. were mostly \$4-8 lower. Heavier steer calves 750-800 lbs. traded \$2-6 higher. Heifers 700-800 lbs. sold steady to \$5 higher. Benchmark steers averaging 727 lbs. sold between \$230-248, averaging \$242.58. — **Anna Miller, WLJ managing editor**

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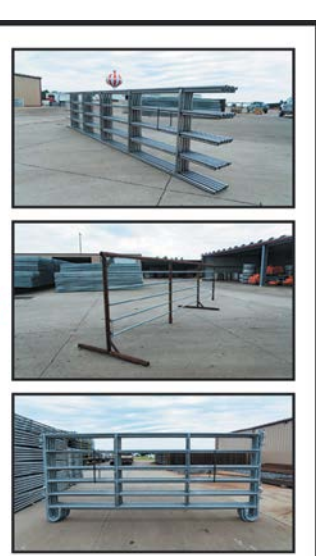
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ALL BREEDS

Jan. 23-27 — Red Bluff Bull & Gelding Sale, Red Bluff, CA
Feb. 3 — Klamath Falls, Bull & Female Sale, Klamath Falls, OR
Feb. 6 — PAY's Blue Ribbon, Stock Cow & Bred Heifer Sale, Billings, MT
Feb. 17 — Great Basin Bull Sale, Fallon, NV
Mar. 1 — Intermountain Genetic Alliance, Bull Sale, Heber City, UT

ANGUS

Jan. 18 — Thomas Angus, Bull Sale, Cheyenne, WY
Jan. 20 — Redland Angus, Bull Sale, Buffalo, WY
Jan. 23 — Huwa Cattle, Bull Sale, Roggen, CO
Jan. 26 — Flesch Angus, Bull Sale, Shelby, MT
Jan. 26 — McConnell Angus, Production Sale, Dix, NE
Jan. 26 — Ruggles Angus, Bull Sale, McCook, NE
Jan. 27 — Baldrige Performance Angus, North Platte, NE
Jan. 27 — Little Goose Ranch, Bull Sale, Buffalo, WY
Feb. 1 — Bear Mountain Angus Ranch, Bull Sale, Palisade, NE
Feb. 2 — Poss Angus, Bull Sale, Scotia, NE
Feb. 3 — Beartooth Angus, Bull Sale, Billings, MT
Feb. 3 — Ellingson Angus, Bull Sale, St. Anthony, ND
Feb. 4 — Frey Angus, Bull Sale, Granville, ND
Feb. 8 — Booth's Cherry Creek Ranch, Bull Sale, Veteran, WY
Feb. 9 — Bar KD & Lambert Ranch, Bull Sale, Alturas, CA
Feb. 9 — Burgess Angus, Bull Sale, Homedale, ID
Feb. 9 — Dutch Flat Angus & CX Ranch, Bull & Female Sale, Lewiston, ID
Feb. 9 — Powder River Angus, Bull Sale, Buffalo, WY
Feb. 10 — EZ Angus Ranch, Bull Sale, Madras, OR
Feb. 10 — Schaff Angus Valley, Bull Sale, St. Anthony, ND
Feb. 12 — BB Cattle Co., Bull Sale, Connell, WA
Feb. 12 — Skyline Angus, Bull Sale, Stevensville, MT
Feb. 13 — South Mountain Cattle, Bull Sale, Caldwell, ID
Feb. 14 — Jindra Angus, Bull Sale, Clarkson, NE
Feb. 14 — Meadow Acres, Bull Sale, Stanfield, OR
Feb. 15 — Krebs Ranch, Bull Sale, Gordon, NE
Feb. 16 — Hoffman Ranch, Bull Sale, Thedford, NE
Feb. 16 — Rees Brothers, Bull Sale, Morgan, UT
Feb. 17 — Great Basin Bull Sale, Fallon, NV
Feb. 17 — Redland Redbank Angus, Bull Sale, Worland, WY
Feb. 17 — Sandhills Source, Bull Sale, Thedford, NE
Feb. 17 — Schiefelbein Farms, Bull Sale, Kimball, MN
Feb. 19 — Frank Cattle & Genetics, Bull Sale, Chappell, NE
Feb. 19 — Teixeira Cattle, Bull Sale, Terrebonne, OR
Feb. 19 — Weaver Ranch, Production Sale, Fort Collins, CO
Feb. 20 — Coleman Angus, Bull Sale, Missoula, MT
Feb. 20 — Kessler Angus, Bull Sale, Milton-Freewater, OR

Feb. 20 — Rooney Angus/7 Triangle 7 Cattle Co., Bull Sale, Brush, CO
Feb. 21 — Shaw Cattle Co., Bull Sale, Caldwell, ID
Feb. 22 — Van Dyke Angus Ranch, Bull Sale, Manhattan, MT
Feb. 23 — Hyline Angus, Bull Sale, Three Forks, MT
Feb. 23 — RS Angus, Bull Sale, Brownell, KS
Feb. 23 — Skinner Ranch, Bull Sale, Hall, MT
Feb. 23 — Star Gate Ranch, Bull Sale, Twin Falls, ID
Feb. 24 — Baker Angus, Bull Sale, Vale, OR
Feb. 24 — Lyman Livestock, Bull Sale, Salina, UT
Feb. 24 — RV Bar Angus, Bull Sale, Jensen, UT
Feb. 25 — Buchanan Angus, Bull Sale, Klamath Falls, OR
Feb. 26 — Circle L Ranch, Bull Sale, Dillon, MT
Feb. 26 — Colyer Angus & Hereford, Bull Sale, Bruneau, ID
Feb. 27 — Barker Cattle, Bull & Female Sale, Burley, ID
Feb. 27 — Connelly Angus Ranch, Bull Sale, Valier, MT
Feb. 27 — Haynes Cattle Co., Bull Sale, Ogallala, NE
Feb. 27 — J.C.Heiken & Sons, Miles City, MT
Feb. 27 — Thomas Angus Ranch, Bull Sale, Baker City, OR
Feb. 28 — Price Cattle, Bull Sale, Stanfield, OR
Feb. 29 — Wooden Shoe Farms, Bull Sale, Blackfoot, ID
Mar. 1 — Crouthamel Cattle, Bull Sale, Stanfield, OR
Mar. 1 — Parry Angus, Bull Sale, Sterling, CO
Mar. 1 — Reminisce Angus, Bull Sale, Dillon, MT
Mar. 2 — 3C Cattle Co., Bull Sale, Stevensville, MT
Mar. 2 — Kimm Angus, Bull Sale, Three Forks, MT
Mar. 2 — Lucky 7 Angus, Bull Sale, Riverton, WY
Mar. 2 — Trinity Farms, Bull Sale, Ellensburg, WA
Mar. 3 — Stevenson Angus, Bull Sale, Hobson, MT

CHAROLAIS

Feb. 20 — V-A-L Charolais, Bull Sale, Vale, OR
Feb. 22 — Small Livestock, Bull Sale, Winnemucca, NV
Feb. 23 — Cowman's Kind, Bull Sale, Madras, OR

GELBIEH

Feb. 5 — Taubenheim Gelbvieh, Production Sale, Amherst, NE
Feb. 24 — Black Gold Genetics, Bull Sale, Pritchett, CO

HEREFORD

Jan. 15 — Van Newkirk Herefords, Bull & Female Sale, Oshkosh, NE
Jan. 23 — Churchill Cattle Co., Bull Sale, Manhattan, MT
Feb. 1 — Ridder Hereford Ranch, Bull Sale, Callaway, NE
Feb. 2 — Elkington Polled Hereford Ranch, Bull Sale, Idaho Falls, ID
Feb. 9 — CX Ranch & Dutch Flat Angus, Bull & Female Sale, Lewiston, ID
Feb. 9 — Lambert Ranch & Bar KD, Bull Sale, Alturas, CA
Feb. 10 — BB Cattle Co., Bull Sale, Connell, WA
Feb. 13 — South Mountain Cattle, Bull Sale, Caldwell, ID
Feb. 14 — Durbin Creek Herefords, Bull Sale, Worland, WY
Feb. 16 — Hoffman Ranch, Bull Sale, Thedford, NE
Feb. 16 — Rees Brothers, Bull Sale, Morgan UT
Feb. 21 — Shaw Cattle Co., Bull Sale, Caldwell, ID
Feb. 26 — Colyer Hereford & Angus, Bull Sale, Bruneau, ID
Feb. 29 — Wooden Shoe Farms, Bull Sale, Blackfoot, ID

RODEO STANDINGS



January PRCA world standings

The top five contestants and earnings are listed as provided on the Professional Rodeo Cowboy Association (PRCA) website, www.prorodeo.com, as of Jan. 10.

All Around

1. Slade Wood, \$14,162.38, New Ulm, TX. 2. Bodie Mattson, \$12,376.84, Sturgis, SD. 3. Paden Bray, \$10,024.71, Stephenville, TX. 4. Stetson Wright, \$9,984.00, Beaver, UT. 5. Chet Weitz, \$8,278.04, London, TX.

Bareback Riding

1. Coop Cooke, \$20,637.39,

Victor, ID. 2. Taylor Broussard, \$19,648.11, Estherwood, LA. 3. Bradlee Miller, \$17,707.37, Huntsville, TX. 4. Keenan Hayes, \$16,818.30, Hayden, CO. 5. Cole Franks, \$14,945.52, Clarendon, TX.

Saddle Bronc Riding

1. Kade Bruno, \$25,721.69, Challis, ID. 2. Wyatt Casper, \$22,715.76, Miami, TX. 3. Qwinton Stroh, \$20,644.14, Glendive, MT. 4. Brody Cress, \$20,421.50, Hillsdale, WY. 5. Logan Cook, \$19,347.40, Alto, TX.

Bull Riding

1. Mason Moody, \$24,457.88, Letcher, SD. 2. Hayes Weight, \$19,828.28, Goshen, UT. 3. Jace Trosclair, \$19,597.84, Chauvin, LA. 4. Dustin Boquet, \$19,293.73, Bourg, LA. 5. Lukasey Morris, \$16,626.97, Union City, OK.

Steer Wrestling

1. Shane Frey, \$11,308.70, Duncan, OK. 2. Justin Shaffer, \$10,093.05, Hallsville, TX. 3. Will Lummus, \$9,902.08,

Byhalia, MS. 4. Grant Peterson, \$9,010.13, Livermore, CA. 5. Gage Hesse, \$8,786.96, Keenesburg, CO.

Team Roping (Headers)

1. Manny Egusquiza, \$10,230.87, Hico, TX. 2. Coy Brittain, \$9,631.94, Rockwall, TX. 3. Cody Reed, \$8,605.62, Jonesboro, AR. 4. Bradley Massey, \$8,306.47, Perry, FL. 5. Bart Brunson, \$7,972.56, Terry, MS.

Team Roping (Heelers)

1. Evan Arnold, \$11,972.47, Stephenville, TX. 2. Jace McDaniel, \$11,439.96, Jonesboro, AR. 3. Clay Green, \$11,115.08, Pine Grove, LA. 4. Ross Ashford, \$9,769.40, Lott, TX. 5. Colton Brittain, \$9,631.94, Rockwall, TX.

Tie-Down Roping

1. Shad Mayfield, \$23,728.25, Clovis, NM. 2. John Douch, \$16,688.69, Huntsville, TX. 3. Brushton Minton, \$16,677.44, Witter Springs, CA. 4. Chance Thiessen, \$14,390.70, Elk City,

OK. 5. Joel Harris, \$11,941.54, San Angelo, TX.

Steer Roping

1. Cole Patterson, \$21,665.156, Pawnee, OK. 2. Jess Tierney, \$14,962.93, Hermosa, SD. 3. Duck Benson, \$13,783.39, Colfax, WA. 4. Slade Wood, \$13,577.43, New Ulm, TX. 5. Cody Lee, \$12,743.30, Gatesville, TX.

Barrel Racing

1. Abby Phillips, \$18,354.91, Marshall, TX. 2. Ashley Castleberry, \$17,235.59, Montgomery, TX. 3. Chloe Gray, \$14,442.83, Yatesville, GA. 4. Skyla Peters, \$12,417.13, Liberal, KS. 5. Taylor Carver, \$11,957.99, Broxton, GA.

Breakaway Roping

1. Jackie Crawford, \$11,658.14, Stephenville, TX. 2. Sawyer Gilbert, \$11,187.11, Buffalo, SD. 3. Willow Wilson, \$10,898.07, Baggs, WY. 4. Christi Braudrick, \$8,770.37, Caddo, OK. 5. Tacy Webb, \$8,645.23, Midway, TX.

RED ANGUS

Feb. 2 — TJS Red Angus, Bull Sale, Buffalo, WY
Feb. 7 — Ludvigson Stock Farms, Bull Sale, Shepherd, MT
Feb. 19 — Frank Cattle & Genetics, Bull Sale, Chappell, NE
Feb. 21 — Shaw Cattle Co., Bull Sale, Caldwell, ID
Mar. 1 — Sutherland Farms, Production Sale, Stevensville, MT
Mar. 2 — Redland Red Angus, Bull Sale, Hysham, MT

SALERS

Feb. 23 — Skinner Ranch, Bull Sale, Hall, MT

SIMANGUS

Jan. 29 — APEX Cattle, Bull, Bred Heifer & Fall Pair Sale, Dannebrog, NE
Feb. 22 — Small Livestock, Bull Sale, Winnemucca, NV
Feb. 23 — Star Gate Ranch, Bull Sale, Twin Falls, ID
Feb. 24 — Baker Angus, Bull Sale, Vale, OR
Feb. 24 — Lyman Livestock, Bull Sale, Salina, UT
Feb. 27 — Barker Cattle, Bull & Female Sale, Burley, ID
Feb. 28 — Price Cattle, Bull Sale, Stanfield, OR
Mar. 2 — Trinity Farms, Bull Sale, Ellensburg, WA

SIMMENTAL

Jan. 29 — APEX Cattle, Bull, Bred Heifer & Fall Pair Sale, Dannebrog, NE
Feb. 5 — Gateway Simmental, Bull Sale, Lewistown, MT
Feb. 8 — Lassle Ranch Simmentals, Bull Sale, Glendive, MT
Feb. 12 — Prickly Pear Simmental, Bull Sale, Helena, MT
Feb. 19 — Bulls of the Big Sky, Bull Sale, Billings, MT
Feb. 25 — Poppe Cattle Co., Bull Sale, Fallon, MT

COMMERCIAL

Jan. 25 — Red Bluff, Replacement Female Sale, Red Bluff, CA
Jan. 25 — Western Video Market Internet Sale, Red Bluff, CA
Feb. 29 — Western Video Market Internet Sale, CA

HORSE

Jan. 23-27 — Red Bluff Bull & Gelding Sale, Red Bluff, CA
Mar. 2 — Winnemucca Ranch, Rodeo Horse Sale, Winnemucca, NV

DOG

Jan. 23-27 — Red Bluff Stock Dog Sale, Red Bluff, CA

Annual Bull Sale FEB. 12, 2024



BB 6038 Britisher 2134

	BW	WW	YW	Milk	M&G	Fat	REA
EPD	+3.0	+49	+76	+27	+51	0.01	+0.4



BB 8101 Mark Don 2097

	BW	WW	YW	Milk	M&G	Fat	REA
EPD	+3.7	+50	+84	+22	+49	0.04	+0.34

HEREFORD

37 Spring calves
 40 Winter calves
 30 Coming 2-year-olds
 3 Polled Calves



BB 6038 Britisher 3018

	BW	WW	YW	Milk	M&G	Fat	REA
EPD	+3.5	+53	+86	+23	+49	-0.13	+0.41

ANGUS

20 Spring calves
 17 Winter calves



BB 6038 Britisher 3002

	BW	WW	YW	Milk	M&G	Fat	REA
EPD	+3.4	+50	+84	+24	+49	-0.06	+0.36



BB Capitalist 3023

	BW	WW	YW	Milk	MARB	REA
EPD	+0.7	+54	+95	+23	0.73	+0.59



BB Foundation 256

	BW	WW	YW	Milk	MARB	REA
EPD	+1.0	+63	+113	+31	0.71	+0.51

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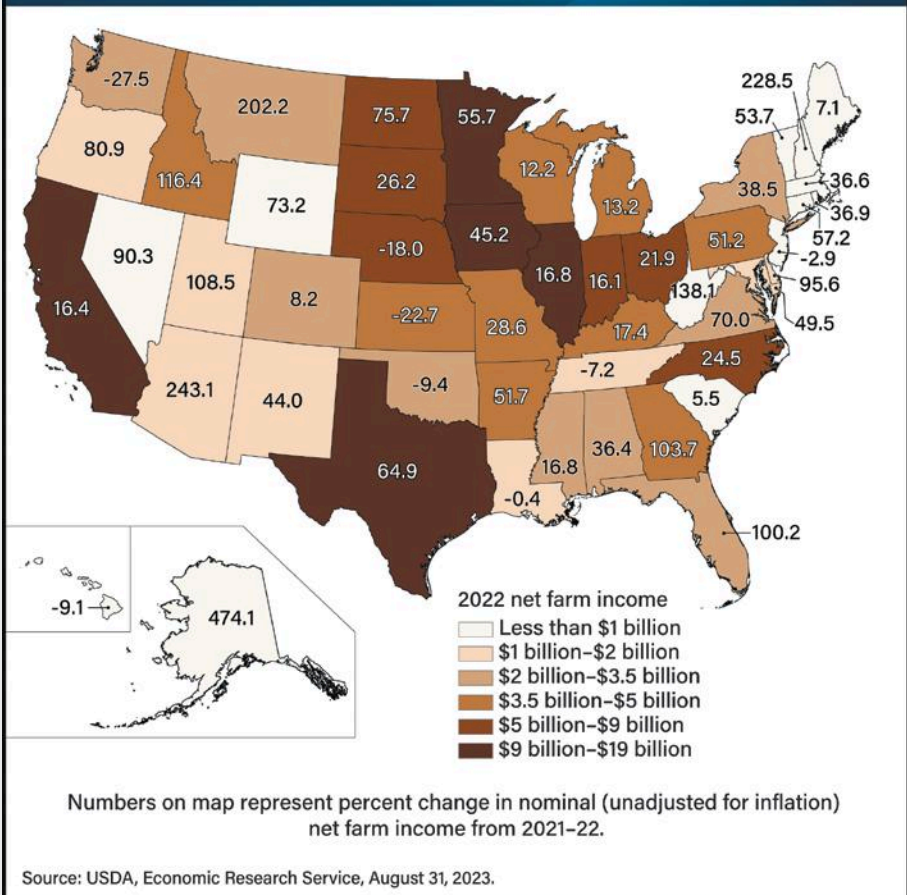
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Most states with high net farm income saw growth in 2022

2022 net farm income by State with percent change from 2021

USDA Economic Research Service
U.S. DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE



The U.S. saw growth of 30.7% in net farm income (NFI) from 2021-22. NFI is a broad measure of farm sector profitability that incorporates noncash items such as depreciation and gross imputed rental income.

Researchers with USDA's Economic Research Service (ERS) used data in the Farm Income and Wealth Statistics to classify states into six categories based on 2022 NFI. Among the five agricultural states with the highest NFI, Texas had the highest NFI growth at 64.9% from 2021-22, followed by Minnesota with 55.7%.

Growth in the remaining top five states (California, Iowa and Illinois) also was strong. Other states among the top 25 for average NFI had a wide range of NFI change from 2021-22.

Many showed strong growth, such as Idaho (116.4%), Georgia (103.7%), Florida (100.2%) and North Dakota (75.7%). However, NFI in Kansas and Washington fell 22.7% and 27.5%, respectively. — **USDA ERS**

Permit needed to discharge waste

MO PRIME (from page 1)

land application of sludge as fertilizer in agricultural fields near the basin location.

The draft water quality and antidegradation review entered public notice on May 26, 2023, leading to significant comments and requests for a public meeting. DNR stated they received over 1,500 public comments opposing the modification, many of which questioned using iLeaf technology. Concerns primarily focused on

sought to implement iLeaf technology for treating effluent waste, but DNR raised concerns in November, expressing its intent to deny the permit due to insufficient practical data on the experimental technology.

The agency scheduled a public hearing on Jan. 6 at the Pleasant Hope Middle School in Pleasant Hope but the application was withdrawn before the event.

DNR said at this time Missouri Prime Beef is prohibited from wastewater discharge until it secures a

"We know that they have engineers, and their engineers are working with our staff engineers on the development of an actual plan for the wastewater treatment system."

— Heather Peters

the documentation for the proposed innovative technology intended for wastewater treatment before discharge.

Additionally, hundreds of people gathered at the Pomme De Terre Lake pavilion in Hermitage, MO, expressing concerns about the release of wastewater into the watershed, according to local outlet KY3.

Missouri Prime Beef received notice of violations in 2022 and 2023 from DNR for failing to renew the Missouri state operating permit and causing pollution to a tributary of the Pomme de Terre River.

The meatpacker had

valid permit, and it is currently only allowed to apply wastewater to land with a permit or temporary enforceable operational parameters established by the department.

Heather Peters, DNR water pollution control branch chief, told KY3 there is still a possibility Missouri Prime Beef will file another application.

"We know that they have engineers, and their engineers are working with our staff engineers on the development of an actual plan for the wastewater treatment system," Peters said. — **Charles Wallace, WLJ contributing editor**



COMING EVENTS

(Send calendar of events information to editorial@wlj.net.)
Jan. 21-Feb. 2 — Mark your calendars for the 2024 Cattle Industry Convention & National

Cattlemen's Beef Association Trade Show, which is heading to the Orange County Convention Center in Orlando, FL. Additional information is available at convention.ncba.org.

FRIDAY, FEBRUARY 16, 2024



36TH ANNUAL PRODUCTION SALE
At the Ranch | Morgan, Utah (Exit 106 off I-84)
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• Semen: \$30/Straw; \$70/Certificate

BW	WW	YW	MM	M&G	REA	MARB	BMI\$	CHB\$
2.0	69	107	21	56	1.22	0.05	423	141



P43722088

NJW 79Z Z311 ENDURE 173D ET

• Powerful growth and performance with added pigment and a flawless EPD profile.

BW	WW	YW	MM	M&G	REA	MARB	BMI\$	CHB\$
3.9	74	126	34	71	1.15	0.23	514	199



P43919937

CHURCHILL BROADWAY 858F

• Unfortunately, we lost this bull this fall due to injury so his progeny will be harder to find. Don't miss out.

BW	WW	YW	MM	M&G	REA	MARB	BMI\$	CHB\$
2.7	69	115	27	62	0.50	0.63	514	207



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Visitors Always Welcome

Grazing cornstalks during the mid-winter

Here in mid-winter, cornstalks remain a great forage resource for livestock producers. So far, snow cover on cornstalks has been minimal, or what snow has fallen has mostly melted off.

While cattle can graze with snow cover, remember that if an icy crust develops on the snow, this will limit grazing and supplemental feed may need to be provided.

Another important consideration is the stocking rate and how long they have been in a particular field. Nutritional value of cornstalk residue is greatest at the beginning of a grazing period and declines with time as the most nutritious plant parts are consumed. A general stalk grazing rule is there are about 30 cow days per 100 bushels of corn that the field produced.

Over the fall and winter, weathering can also play a role in reducing cornstalk

quality. Rain or melting snow soaks into dry corn stalk residue and leaches out some of the soluble nutrients. Most serious is the loss of sugars and other energy-dense nutrients, which lowers the total digestible nutrients, or energy value of the stalks.

Another factor that affects cornstalk grazing is wind. We have had our share of excessively high winds which easily blow corn leaves and husks off the field. This of course, can impact the amount of feed, and after grain, those leaves and husks contain the highest nutritional quality.

Cornstalks are still a great and economical winter feed source. Just be sure to closely monitor cow and field conditions while adjusting your supplementation program accordingly. — **Jerry Volesky, Nebraska Extension**