Cow Country Reporter

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News from your CEO

The month of February has many events. February 2 Ground Hog Day, February 14 Valentine's Day, February 16 is President's Day (Wahington and Lincoln). This year Mardi Gras is Feb. 17 and Lent begins Feb. 18, (Ash Wednesday).

Speaking of special days on January 23, the USDA. Cattle On Feed Report was released, and it showed as of January 1, 2026, Cattle on Feed was down 3%, December placements down 5% and December Marketings were up 2%. The USDA Cattle Inventory released January 30, 2026, showed All Cattle and Calves less than 1%, (LA down 6%) Cows and Heifers that have calved down slightly (LA. Down 5%), Beef Cows down 1%, Milk cows up 2%. All Heifers over 500 lbs., down 1%, Beef Replacement Heifers up 1%, Calf Crop down 2% (LA down 2%). Please note that LA. along with 18 other states, just reported All Cattle and Calves, Cows, Heifers that have calved and the Calf Crop starting with the 2025 Cattle Inventory. This report does not show LA. Beef and Milk Cows Replacements. The month of January also had 2 other events that affected the cow/calf industry in Louisiana. Superior Livestock Video had a sale which had over 35 Louisiana lots of steer and heifer calves for June-Aug. delivery sold dollars higher than last year. Mixed loads of steers and heifers, 6 weights, sold from $385.00-$398.00 on steers and $12.00-$15.00 back on heifers. A straight load of steers weighing 650 lbs. at $412.00 for July delivery and 1000 head 650/630 for July delivery sold $429.00 steers and $409.00 heifers. The other major event in January was the ice and snowstorm that hit the weekend of January 24th and lasted into early February bringing closed highways, downed trees and power outages. This month's market we will see the results of January in the marketplace for our good Louisiana calves and yearlings.

Dave Foster, CEO

Hypothermia in Calves

By: Mark Z. Johnson, Oklahoma State University Extension Beef Cattle Breeding Specialist

Hypothermia (lower than normal body temperature), is one of the major causes of death in newborn calves. With a significant winter storm on the way to Oklahoma this article addresses how to identify, prevent and manage cold stress in baby calves. Moderate environmental temperatures aren't typically a problem for calves produced by cows with adequate milk/colostrum supply that are in good condition (Body Condition score of 5.5 – 6). Calves from cows that have had good nutrition during the last trimester of pregnancy have a layer of brown fat that serves as a rapidly mobilized energy reserve to make them vigorous at birth and quick to get up and nurse. On the other hand, calves from thin cows may not have the energy needed and are more susceptible to hypothermia. Wet and cold weather (below 50 degrees F) accompanied by wind will take a toll on calves especially if the calving process takes longer than normal. Dystocia (calving difficulty), increases the amount of time a calf will take to stand and nurse, which increases the potential of hypothermia. Calves maintain body temperature by converting food into body heat. Calves need to stand and nurse an adequate amount of colostrum as soon as possible after birth. If there is any question as to whether a calf has ingested an adequate amount, use a tube feeder or bottle to administer warm, high fat (up to 10%) colostrum. A practical rule-of-thumb is to feed 5% to 6% of the calf's body weight within the first four hours and repeat the feeding when the calf is about 12 hours old. For an 80-pound calf, this will equate to about 2 quarts of colostrum per feeding. Calves that nurse or are given colostrum within the first two to four hours after birth fare much better throughout their entire lives.

There are several ways to assist a hypothermic calf, the first step is knowing when to help. Normal rectal temperature of a newborn calf is 101.5 – 102.5 degrees F. A thermometer will help to know if a calf is at risk. If the temperature

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Hypothermia in Calves

drops below 101 degrees F, help may be needed. Place a finger in the mouth to check for a suckling reflex. The mouth of a healthy calf will be warm and moist and the calf will attempt to chew or suck your finger. Lack of a suckling reflex is a definite sign that you are dealing with a cold stressed calf that needs assistance. When calves are cold, the body responds in two ways: shivering and diverting blood flow to their inner core. Shivering is an involuntary reflex that increases heat produced by the muscle, but it requires energy. Excessive shivering, erratic behavior, confusion and clumsy movement are all signs of hypothermia. Mild hypothermia is a calf temperature below 100 degrees F. Severe hypothermia, when internal organs start to cool is below 94 degrees F.

When rewarming a calf is necessary, there are two routes: internal and external. Administering colostrum should be the first step to warm the calf internally. Warm (100 – 102 degrees F), high quality colostrum is vital as it provides fat and energy that will be burned for internal heat. In some cases, administering colostrum or milk replacer may need to be repeated. Externally, the following steps should be followed to treat and prevent hypothermia in at risk calves.

1. Dry calves immediately, remove all wetness with towels or a blow dryer.
2. Warm externally, use heat lamps, the floor board of your farm truck, a "hot box," or a warm water bath (around 100°F, gradually increasing). Remove heat source when calf's temperature is up to 99 degrees F and monitor to ensure they are able to maintain their temperature.
3. Get calves off the cold ground, place calves on pallets or blankets to prevent heat loss.
4. Get calves to a warm, dry, sheltered area like a barn, garage or shop.

References:

https://beef.unl.edu/beefwatch/2023/managing-hypothermia-newborn-calves.

The Importance of Colostrum. Cow-Calf Corner Newsletter. January 9, 2023. https://extension.okstate.edu/programs/beef-extension/cow-calf-corner-the-newsletter-archives/2023/january-9-2023.html

Mark Johnson, OSU Extension beef cattle breeding specialist, discusses the importance of colostrum during the first 12 hours after a calf is born on SunUp TV from January 16, 2023. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=red5DqoD8hA&list=PLglOSpV-Tcac6-pVMv0BEAk78_7tJCuap&index=149

Water Needs during Cold Weather

By: Dana Zook, OSU Cooperative Extension NW Area Livestock Specialist

During winter, much of the conversation around cow management focuses on helping cattle maintain body condition through cold temperatures. Supplementation and feeding strategies are always top of mind, but one often overlooked component of winter management is water. How much water do cows really need during cold weather?

As temperatures decrease, cows' energy requirements increase. This added energy is typically supplied through dry feeds such as hay, byproduct cubes, or commodity blends. Adequate water intake is essential for cows to properly digest these feeds. When water is limited, feed intake often declines, making it difficult for cows to maintain body weight and condition.

Stage of production also plays a significant role in determining water needs. As production demands increase, so does water intake. Lactating cows, for example, require more water than pregnant, non-lactating cows. Water intake data collected by Oklahoma State University and other research institutions provide baseline estimates across production stages. These guidelines are useful for producers hauling water or planning new water infrastructure.

So, how much water do cows need in cold weather? OSU factsheet AFS-3299, Estimating Water Requirements for Mature Beef Cows, reports that 1,300-pound cows experiencing 40°F temperatures typically require 9 to 15 gallons of water per day. The lower end of this range applies to open or pregnant, dry cows, while the higher end reflects the needs of lactating cows.

Additional research is currently underway by Dr. Dave Lalman and his research team to further refine these estimates. In a recent study, five-year-old cows averaging 1,363 pounds with calves at side have consumed an average of 15 gallons per day since mid-November. This total includes calf consumption; however, it is reasonable to assume calves account for 1 to 2 gallons daily.

This highlights the importance of ensuring calves have access to water. Tanks should be filled high enough for smaller animals to reach the water, and natural water sources should be kept open so calves can safely drink.

Water is often considered a "hot weather" concern, but its importance should not be overlooked during winter. Dehydration adds stress during cold conditions. Ensuring cows have adequate access to water is a simple yet critical step in helping them manage winter stress and maintain body condition.

Clint's Catch Pen

Some scattered bits of BEEF industry news gathered while researching other stories.

By: Clint Peck

Beef exports/imports

U.S. beef exports are expected to decline further in 2026 as the impacts of declining beef production, high global beef prices, and continued political unrest weigh on the export markets.

The economic impacts of recent declines in exports on U.S. cattle prices have been largely masked relative to record domestic beef prices. However, analysts say lost international market share may impact cattle and beef markets for many years to come.

There have been a few notable recent developments in the global beef market.

First, as of January 1, 2026, the U.S. tariff-rate-quota for countries without a specific quota, or an established free trade agreement, has decreased to 52,005 metric tons (MT), while a new quota has been established for the United Kingdom at 13,000 MT. Once the quota is filled, imports from countries that do not have access to other quotas or trade agreements are subject to an out-of-quota tariff of 26.4%.

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Second, China established beef quota allotments for most large exporting countries, on which China applied a 55% over-quota tariff rate. This may limit Chinese imports from countries like Brazil, Australia, and Argentina. Remember that export registrations for most U.S. beef facilities expired in 2025 and have still not been renewed, meaning that minimal U.S. beef is currently being exported to China.

Finally, Mexico recently announced a new 70,000 MT quota for beef imports from countries without a free trade agreement. Previously, Mexico had an anti-inflation decree that allowed beef to enter duty-free even if Mexico did not have a free-trade agreement with any particular country.

Sandhills Ranch sells

Gottsch Feeding Corporation recently sold its Pawnee Springs Land and Cattle LLC to billionaires Mark and Robyn Jones of Westlake, Texas. The purchase of the roughly 40,000-acre Sandhills property went down for a reported $56 million.

Part owners of publicly-traded Goosehead Insurance, the Jones' also own the 126,000-acre Flying Eagle Ranch in northwest Montana. That property is mostly forested timberland s of west of Kalispell and Whitefish.

Among past owners of the Nebraska property are former governor Keith Neville and construction mogul Peter Kiewit, who bought the operation in 1949. The Jones' say they plan to continue operating Pawnee Springs as a working ranch as a legacy for their children and grandchildren.

Gottsch Feeding started leasing the ranch in 1985 and eventually purchased the property, according to the Nebraska Examiner. In a statement regarding the sale, the Gottsch family said "with a heavy heart" it agreed to sell a ranch that has been part of their family for 41 years.

Pinkeye and "fish oil"

Pinkeye or Infectious Bovine Keratoconjunctivitis (IBK) has been popping up at an alarming rate across the country. Usually caused by infection with Moraxella bovis, and less frequently with Moraxella bovoculi, the affliction has generally been known to be a "summertime" problem.

But strains of Mycoplasma are emerging as distinct pathogens causing similar pinkeye symptoms. Mycoplasma complicates pinkeye treatment with traditional antibiotics because the pathogens lack cell walls. Co-infection with Mycoplasma also appears to depress the immune function in and around the eye itself, thus interfering with immunity induced by Moraxella sp. vaccination

Close diagnosis by a bovine veterinarian and treatment consultation is advised when dealing with any pinkeye outbreak.

As a sidelight, veterinarians are cautioning against using WD-40® when treating for pinkeye. WD-40® is commonly perceived as a lubricant containing fish oil, but it is made from petroleum distillates, not fish oil. Therefore, the product should never be applied to animals as the petroleum-based compounds are unsafe for living tissue, especially sensitive eye membranes.

Beef production steady

End-of-the-year numbers showing U.S. fourth-quarter 2025 beef production was raised over what was earlier forecasted—bringing the annual total to an even 26.0 billion pounds.

Looking ahead, USDA's 2026 beef production is forecast at 25.735 billion pounds as heavier expected carcass weights help offset fewer fed cattle marketings.

As we closed out 2025, dressed steers averaged 983 lbs., a new all-time high for the industry. Carcass weights in 2026 are projected to further increase by 5 lbs. per carcass. Feedlots will continue to have incentives to push cattle weights, aided by packers who are also seeking additional pounds of beef as cattle numbers continue to tighten.

Carcass weights have trended heavier for over 60 years, with steer carcass weights increasing by an average of 4.0 pounds per year, up over 240 pounds from 660 pounds in the 1960s. Average steer carcass weights in 2019 were 879.0 lbs.

Increased carcass weights are the result of more days on feed combined with changing cattle genetics and use of feeding technology, such as implants, ionophores, and beta agonists, said Derrell Peel, Oklahoma State University Extension livestock marketing specialist.

Mexican gray wolves

An annual helicopter count of Mexican gray wolves by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) has been indefinitely paused. Meanwhile, efforts to remove the Mexican gray wolf of endangered species status passed the U.S. House in December.

H.R. 845, the "Pet and Livestock Protection Act," passed with a 211-204 vote. That bill is currently under consideration in the Senate.

The USFWS, the New Mexico Department of Game and Fish, and the Arizona Game and Fish Department have been working for 25 years to "recover" Mexican gray wolf populations. There were 286 Mexican gray wolves counted in New Mexico and Arizona during the 2025 population count.

The Public Lands Council (PLC), an arm of the National Cattlemen's Beef Association, and the New Mexico Cattle Growers Association (NMCGA) announced their support for legislation that would delist the Mexican gray wolf and separate the populations in the U.S. and Mexico, allowing for proper management of the species.

"The time has come to delist the Mexican wolf and to stop the insanity of tying wolf recovery in the United States, where it has been a success, to recovery of the wolf in Mexico, where all work to date has been an utter failure." said NMCGA president Tom Paterson.

Winter Weather Hits Cattle Producers Hard

Extreme cold forces extra cattle care while feedlot numbers fall to six-year lows, signaling tighter beef supplies ahead for consumers.

By: Derrell Peel, Oklahoma State University Extension

Much of cattle country is in the midst of a severe winter event, including extremely cold temperatures and, in some regions, heavy snow and/or ice. These conditions create numerous management challenges for cattle producers and will impact cattle markets in the coming weeks and perhaps months.

Prolonged sub-freezing temperatures require much additional effort by cattle producers to ensure water availability (chopping ice) and provide additional feed required to maintain cattle. For cow-calf operations in calving season, the challenges are greater. Newborn calves are especially vulnerable to cold weather until they get dried off and successfully nurse. It takes additional effort to save calves and avoid frozen ears, tails and feet. Calf losses may impact cattle supplies in the coming months. The cold temperatures will reduce feedlot cattle performance, adding additional days to finish cattle and reducing carcass weights and beef production in the coming weeks.

The January Cattle on Feed report showed an on-feed total of 11.45 million head to start the year, down 3.2 percent year over year and the fourteenth consecutive month of declining feedlot inventories. Average feedlot inventories for the past year (twelve-month moving average) are now at the lowest level since September 2018 and are down 3.8 percent from the cyclical peak in September 2022.

December feedlot placements were down 5.4 percent from one year ago and were the ninth consecutive month of lower placements. Total placements for the last six months account for 92 percent of the current feedlot inventory and were down 8.2 percent year over year. Figure 1 shows the sharp decrease in average feedlot placements and marketings.

Feedlot marketings in December were higher than last year, up 1.8 percent year over year. Slightly higher December marketings follow an 11.9 percent drop in November marketings and were the first increase in monthly marketings in eight months. Total marketings the past six months were down 6.9 percent year over year.

The January Cattle on Feed report also included the quarterly inventory of steers and heifers in feedlots. Heifers as a percentage of feedlot inventories increased to 38.7 percent, the highest level in the last year. Heifers continue to make up an above average share of total cattle on feed, suggesting limited heifer retention thus far. USDA will release the Cattle report on January 30 and provide data on cattle inventories, including the inventory of replacement heifers.

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