Cow Country Reporter

May 2026 Volume 18 Issue 5

In This Issue

Cattle Producers Of Louisiana
P.O. Box 886
Prairieville, Louisiana 70769
Website: www.lacattle.org

Dave Foster
Chief Executive Officer
fostercrib2@gmail.com
225-335-3345

News from your CEO

Cattle producers in Louisiana were just a few days away from running out of grass in late April when Ma Nature smiled on them and produced some much-needed rain. April also saw record prices for slaughter steers and heifers (fat cattle) in the last week in April, $250.00-$257.50 mostly $254.00-$257.50 late in the week, which was $9.00-$11.00 cwt. higher than the previous week. Calves, yearlings and replacement cattle all broke record prices going into May. Superior Video Auction, Gulf Coast Classic held in Natchitoches, LA on April 16-17 also set records for calves delivered in May to September. Compared to last year's sale prices were $700.00 to $800.00 per head higher with some cattle over $1000.00 per head higher.

The LSU Hill Farm Research Station in Homer, LA. held its 13th Annual Northwest Beef Forage Field Day on April 30. A good crowd was on hand, and they heard great presentations on Cattle Market Updates by Dr. Kurt Guidry, Dr. Matheus Ferreira presented data on Feed Consumption, Dr. Ron Strahan presented Herbicide Updates and Pre-Emerge Herbicide Plot Results and Dr. Randy Price brought 2 drones to demonstrate spraying a field. Very informative! There were updates about LSU Ag Center and Master Farmer programs by Dr. Mike Salassi and Dr. Tara Smith. Calving Problems and Herd Health issues were presented by Tripp Morgan, Dr. Ashley Edwards and George Gamble, DVM. CPL was one of the 20 sponsors of this informative event.

What will May bring? We are living in some changing times, so keep informed of what is going on in the livestock and grain sector by going to the CPL website, lacattle.org and checking out the Helpful Links and Resources section to keep current of what is happening in our industry. Enjoy the month of May!

Dave Foster, CEO

The Hamburger Story

By: Derrell S. Peel, Oklahoma State University Extension Livestock Marketing Specialist

As total beef production falls and beef prices increase to record levels, demand for ground beef increases. In 2025, a 3.6 decrease in beef production was offset by increased net beef imports to hold total per capita beef consumption steady with the previous year. Per capita beef consumption for 2025 was estimated at 59.8 pounds per person. Total beef production thus far in 2026 is down 6.2 percent and is expected to be down 3 - 4 percent annually for the year with per capita beef consumption declining despite additional beef imports this year.

A breakdown of beef consumption shows that per capita supplies of ground beef increased in 2025 to the highest level since 2004. Ground beef supplies were estimated at 28.6 pounds per person, up 0.61 pounds per person. Remaining beef consumption (carcass) was estimated at 31.2 pounds, down 0.44 pounds per person (Figure 1).

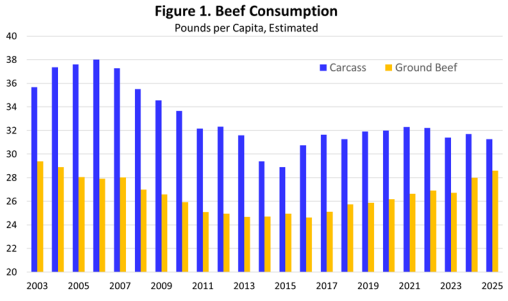


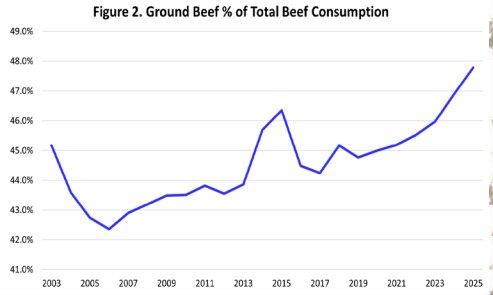
Figure 2 shows that ground beef currently makes up the highest percentage of total beef consumption back to 2003 and is probably at a record level in the U.S. Ground beef consumption has increased simultaneously with record ground beef prices. This happens because ground beef is still the beef product that consumers turn to when beef prices generally rise. Since 2022,

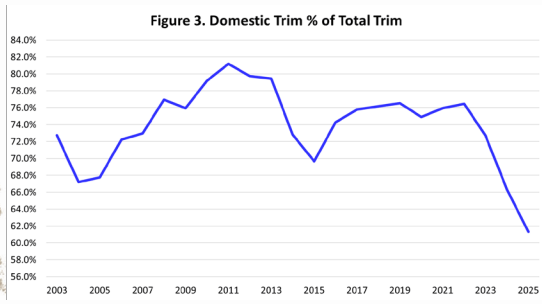
(continued on page 2)

The Hamburger Story

the average wholesale price across 39 beef products has been an increase of over 44 percent. However, wholesale ground beef prices have increased over 57 percent over the same period.

The challenges of meeting ground beef demand are substantial. Ground beef utilizes fatty trimmings from fed cattle and lean trimmings from cull cows and other sources. Total cow slaughter decreased 28.7 percent from 2022 through 2025, leading to a 24.8 percent decrease in nonfed beef production. This is the primary source of lean processing beef used in ground beef mixtures. There are a multitude of ways to prepare ground beef mixtures but a ratio of seven pounds of 90 percent lean to one pound of 50 percent lean is representative of a common 85 percent lean ground beef mixture. This means that seven pounds of cull cow-type beef is required for each pound of trimmings from fed steers and heifers. Fed carcasses produce 150-250 pounds of trim, which means that the lean trim from three to four cull cows is needed to utilize all of the fatty trimmings from each fed carcass. Not enough cow beef is available and lean supplies are routinely supplemented by imported lean. Over the past 20 years, an average of 25 percent of total trim used for ground beef has been from imported beef. In 2025, imported trim accounted for an estimated 38.7 percent of total ground beef trim, leading to the domestic lean share of trim at the lowest level in more than 20 years, currently 61.3 percent (Figure 3). Increased imported trim in the current market is important to support the value of fatty trimmings from fed cattle.





Maintaining the ground beef market is critical in the current situation. Consumer demand for ground beef is high and the ability of beef to be competitive with other proteins depends on ground beef - and fast food demand for hamburgers, in particular.

Derrell Peel explains why beef prices are rising and what it means for consumers, ranchers, and the overall cattle market on SunUpTV from April 27, 2026. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Buc9eWwR3Ow

How old is that cow?

New technology is looking to take the guesswork and hassle out of aging cows.

By: Clint Peck

One of the least fun things to do chute-side is aging cows. Even if you can find an experienced hand who knows what he or she is doing, determining age by dentition can be guesswork and inconsistent at best.

New technology, though, aims at zeroing in on a cow's age by combining electronic imagery, wireless communication, and artificial intelligence (AI). MolarMetrics, a Rockbridge County, Virginia, company, has developed age verification technology using electronic images of dentition to produce objective estimates of a cow's age.

For the novice, cattle lack upper incisors, and instead of upper teeth have a tough upper dental pad. Aging a cow focuses on the eruption of the permanent teeth along the lower jaw. Once a cow has a "full mouth," aging becomes a matter of assessing tooth wear rather than eruption. This is less accurate because diet and grazing environment (e.g., grazing grasses grown on sandy soil) can accelerate dental wear.

"The goal of our technology is to support producers, veterinarians, auction barns, feedlots, and regulators by reducing human error and reducing the hassle in aging cattle," said Stewart Green, co-founder and CEO of MolarMetrics. "We believe this technology represents a practical step toward greater confidence, consistency, and transparency in that process."

How it works

For the user, the MolarMetrics cattle aging process is relatively easy.

An image of the cow's lower jaw is taken using a cell phone, or other camera connected to a computer, or possibly a set of AI-powered "smart glasses." That image is uploaded through MolarMetrics' application (app).

The hard part is left to MolarMetrics, where in under five seconds, the image spins through its AI-powered software and spits out a detailed age assessment along with a confidence score of the results.

"Our proprietary AI model has been trained on thousands of livestock dental images, achieving accuracy rates that consistently outperform professional veterinarians," explained Green.

The speed of commerce

Bill McDonald, owner of McDonald Farms, Blacksburg, Virginia, was an early MolarMetrics collaborator. As a purebred Simmental, SimAngus and Angus seedstock producer, McDonald naturally knows the age of his cows.

Using age-verified cattle, McDonald, along with scores of other cattlemen, worked with Green and his associates to cross-check and fine-tune MolarMetrics' technology. While he might not be the typical end-user, he's sold on the technology.

"I have total confidence in how this system works," McDonald said. "It's so accurate and fast, it's almost unbelievable."

And turnaround time, McDonald acknowledged, is especially critical when processing cows, whether while doing routine on-farm herd work or running cattle through an auction barn. He's convinced this technology can operate at the speed of commerce.

"In the time it takes a veterinarian to preg-check a cow, we can take the photo and have results back in front of us," McDonald said. "I think this is going to be a game-changer when it comes to aging cattle."

McDonald also emphasized that it doesn't take a highly-trained, experienced individual to capture the dental image and upload it using the MolarMetrics app.

(continued on page 3)

How old is that cow?

What's it cost?

The cost for the service is graduated—today pricing starts at a high of $1.90/scan and goes down to $0.825/scan. MolarMetrics does offer a free three-scan trial.

For the average cowherd, the cost for MolarMetrics' 250-scan "Enterprise" package is $1.50/scan. Users can lower the cost to $0.825/scan by purchasing 5,000 or more scan credits. Users only pay for the credits—with no hidden fees or subscription charges.

Green said his company can work with sale barns, veterinarians, or consultants to create high-volume "umbrella" accounts so they can use MolarMetrics' technology along with their other services. Users are able to connect with existing livestock management interfaces or herd tracking systems. The company offers technical support to ensure "tailored" and smooth integration with other software.

To keep fine-tuning its technology, MolarMetrics also offers a "Contributor Program" to incorporate additional breed differences and geographical variations into MolarMetrics' database—and improve the overall results.

"As our dataset continues to grow, we're steadily improving accuracy and refining our models in this emerging technology," Green added. "Producers with detailed, verifiable birth records are invited to apply to the MolarMetrics Contributor Program."

The program includes a vetting process to uphold the rigor and data integrity necessary for peer-reviewed scientific research. Producers interested in contributing can reach out to MolarMetrics by messaging support@molarmetricsai.com for more information.

Halter launches first virtual fencing via satellite

Direct-to-satellite smart collars remove need for cell towers, enabling ranchers to manage cattle anywhere they can see the sky.

Virtual fencing provider Halter has introduced direct-to-satellite connectivity from its smart cattle collars, enabling the technology to serve large, remote operations on millions of acres of land that were previously out of reach.Halter

Halter, a leading digital operating system for pasture-based ranches, announced the launch of direct-to-satellite connectivity for its smart cattle collars, a world first that removes the need for cell towers or on-ranch infrastructure.

Using Starlink, the new technology enables ranchers to manage cattle anywhere they can see the sky. Combined with a suite of new tools for reproduction, animal behavior and precision pasture management, the release significantly expands what is possible for cattle ranch management.

Beef ranchers in remote and rugged regions that were limited by connectivity can now turn to virtual fencing to run more productive and sustainable operations – at a time when they face rising fuel costs, labor shortages and aging workforce pressures.

Halter's internal modeling estimates direct-to-satellite capability expands coverage of the U.S. beef cattle market by 2.5x.

Until now, Halter's solar-powered, GPS-enabled collars relied on Halter's proprietary long-range radio towers. With direct-to-satellite, the collars can communicate via Starlink, eliminating ground infrastructure entirely.

"Connectivity has been the final barrier to bringing virtual fencing across remote and expansive ranches," said Craig Piggott, CEO and founder of Halter. "Direct-to-satellite allows ranchers to manage hundreds of thousands of acres in the most remote terrain on the planet. Combined with our new suite of product features, these ranchers can be even more productive."

Lloyd Calvert, livestock and agriculture manager at High Lonesome Ranch in western Colorado, has been among the first to deploy the satellite-enabled system across the ranch's 225,000 acres of complex terrain.

"Halter has changed the game completely," said Calvert. "Satellite unlocks the ability to run very remote country while still seeing what the cattle are doing, without needing someone with them all the time. We call ourselves 'Halter junkies' now because we can check to see where the cows are anytime of day, no matter where I am. It gives me a great deal of assurance, and that's irreplaceable."

Alongside the launch, Halter is announcing its largest-ever product upgrade for beef cattle ranchers. This update will include an all-in-one heat detection tool to identify cycling animals before and through breeding, behavioral monitoring providing near-real-time insight into grazing, rumination and other indicators of cattle performance, and more advanced pasture and grazing features including satellite-based forage insight, grazing plans and templates, the ability to calculate and track animal demand and comprehensive grazing records.

Halter direct-to-satellite will be available to beef operations in the U.S., New Zealand and coming soon to Australia and Canada. Interested ranchers can learn more at www.halterhq.com/beef. Watch a video explaining Halter Direct-to-Satellite.

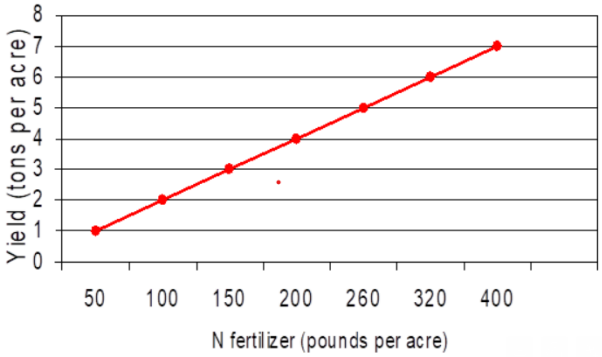
Halter is transforming cattle ranching and dairy farming with smart cattle collars that combine virtual fencing, active herd guidance and real-time animal monitoring in a single device. Halter's solar-powered, satellite-connected collars help farmers cut fencing and labor costs, recover valuable time and improve pasture utilization. Halter serves more than 2,000 customers across the U.S., New Zealand and Australia. The company is headquartered in Auckland, New Zealand, with Australian operations based in Melbourne and U.S. operations in Colorado.

Relationship of Bermudagrass Yield to Nitrogen Fertilization

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

Bermudagrass, an introduced forage, is very important to Oklahoma cow-calf operations. Bermudagrass has some highly beneficial characteristics. Yield, persistence, nutritional value, timing of growth and production, tolerance to heavy grazing, responsiveness to fertilization and resistance to herbicides. A key benefit of Bermudagrass is the potential to support higher stocking rates than native range. When properly managed (for weed control and fertilization) and in response to adequate rain, Bermudagrass has the potential to be highly productive. On the downside, Bermudagrass requires these inputs on an annual basis in order to achieve maximum productivity. The chart below shows the linear response of bermudagrass production relative to Nitrogen applied.

Relationship of Bermudagrass Yield to Nitrogen Fertilization



This chart can be used to manage fertilizer inputs in order to meet target goals for production. With a recent spike in the cost of fertilizer, use the chart to budget and plan for your grazing or hay needs this summer. Timely application of fertilizer is critical to capitalize on the production potential of Bermudagrass pastures to achieve the production levels needed. Getting fertilizer applied ahead of spring rains and summer heat will increase the impact of Nitrogen fertilizer on Bermudagrass productivity.

Reference: Chapter 11, OSU Beef Cattle Manual. Seventh Edition. E-913. Oklahoma Cooperative Extension Service.

CATTLE PRODUCERS OF LOUISIANA
P.O. BOX 886
PRAIRIEVILLE, LOUISIANA 70769
WEBSITE: WWW.LACATTLE.ORG