

Cow Country Reporter



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News from your CEO

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August is a month that many Louisiana cow/calf producers sell their Spring-born calves. Everything looked good for our good Louisiana calves in the first week in July and then the markets started a downward spiral pricewise. The market for "fat" cattle and feeders both dropped like a rock thru the end of July. What will August bring? During the weeks of July 13 until July 31 all we saw was lower prices. During this time frame we had 3 major reports that may have had an impact on the market; USDA Cattle Inventory as of July 1, 2026, USDA Cattle on Feed for July and the USDA announcement of the US border opening to Mexican cattle on August 24, 2026. The Cattle Inventory showed a slight increase of all cattle and calves (94.2 million head compared to 94.0 million head) with beef cows down 1%, beef replacement heifers up 3% and the calf crop down 2%. The July Cattle

on Feed report came in with total cattle on feed in July up 2%, June placements down 3% and marketings down 3%. Then with the border opening up (slowly) in August the screwworm scare increased or at the very least caused concern for some.

Sadly two events happened on July 13, 2026. Two longtime members of CPL passed away, Dr. "Mack" Lea and Harry Laws. Dr. Lea was a veterinarian (State Vet for LDAF) and a great source of wisdom on animal health and Harry Laws was a retired County Agent for Iberville and West Baton Rouge Parishes who did a great job assisting and promoting FFA and 4-H young people. They both will be missed.

Keep cool this month! Check the cattle markets and don't forget to pay your \$50.00 CPL dues this month or you may not receive your next newsletter.

Dave Foster, CEO

CATTLE CYCLE UPDATE AND THE MEXICAN BORDER

July Cattle report shows beef cow numbers down while replacement heifers edge higher. Feedlot inventory climbs amid slower turnover and heavier weights.

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

Cattle Cycle Update

The July Cattle report pegged the total U.S. cattle inventory as essentially unchanged from last year, up a scant 0.2 percent (Table 1). The beef cow herd was down 0.7 percent, indicating that the herd inventory has not yet stabilized. However, the beef replacement heifer inventory was up 2.7 percent, following the slight increase in the January 1 estimate. The January and July estimates of beef heifer inventories suggest a very slow process of heifer retention.

The 2026 calf crop is estimated at 32.5 million head, down 1.5 percent from 2025. The estimated feeder supply calculated from the July report is down 0.6 percent from last year. The smaller 2026 calf crop means that feeder supplies will continue to decrease through 2027; even more if heifer retention accelerates.

Table 1. July Cattle Report

	2025	2026	% Change
	1000 Head	1000 Head	
All Cattle and Calves	94,000	94,200	+0.2
Beef Cows	28,650	28,450	-0.7
Dairy Cows	9,450	9,650	+2.1
Beef Replacements	3,700	3,800	+2.7
Dairy Replacements	3,500	3,600	+2.9
Feeder Supply	33,800	33,600	-0.6
Cattle on Feed	13,000	13,200	+1.5
Calf Crop	32995.6	32,500	-1.5

Cattle, NASS, 2026

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CATTLE CYCLE UPDATE AND THE MEXICAN BORDER

Cattle on Feed

Also released last Friday was the July monthly Cattle on Feed (COF) report. Placements in June were down 2.9 percent year over year, and marketings were down 2.7 percent from last year. The July 1 on-feed total was 11.37 million head, up 2.2 percent year over year. The COF inventory has been higher year over year since March. This increase is due to the fact that feedlot marketings have decreased 8.4 percent over the last six months while placements have only decreased by 2.9 percent. Slow feedlot turnover is contributing to increased days on feed; increased carcass weights and increased yield grade 4/5 percentage. On average for the past 12 months, 28 percent of fed cattle have been yield grade 4/5, a new record high level.

Mexican Border Reopening

Last week, USDA announced that a phased reopening of the Mexican border for livestock imports would begin on August 24. The initial opening will only include the Douglas, Arizona port. If all goes well, the New Mexico ports of Columbus and Santa Teresa may open some weeks later, but no date has been announced.

The emotional response to the border reopening is difficult to anticipate, but the market impact of the USDA announcement should be minimal, other than, perhaps, an initial futures response. The flow of Mexican cattle will be very small for many weeks, with a relatively small number of cattle likely to be imported in the remainder of the year. It is uncertain if a return to historic levels of Mexican cattle imports will happen, but if it does, it will likely take many months.

CATTLE DEATH TOLL CLIMBS WITH EXTREME HEAT AND HUMIDITY

Despite stepped up efforts by producers to keep cattle cool, there have been reports of rising death losses in cattle feedlots from North to South.

By: Michelle Rook

Alarming Cattle Death Losses Due to Heat

The extreme heat and humidity are taking their toll across cattle country and dealing a crushing blow to feedlot operators and farmer feeders.

Derrell Peel, extension livestock marketing specialist at Oklahoma State University, says Wednesday in Stillwater the heat index was 110 to 112 degrees with an actual temperature of 102.

"So it's extremely tough," he explains. "It [the heat] came on rather suddenly, which I think is probably part of the problem in terms of the impact on these animals. There wasn't much adjustment time, which is a key. Obviously, these animals are big and heavy."

Performance Losses

Despite stepped-up efforts by producers to keep cattle cool, there have been reports of rising death losses in cattle feedlots from North to South and performance has also been compromised. Cattle weight gains have been going backward, says Zach Tindall with Producers Livestock Marketing.

"You think 3% on a 1,600-lb. steer is 48 lb. I would guess in the last three days when you got heat index values close to 120 or even 130 in places in Nebraska, those cattle have shrunk 100 lb. pretty easy," he explains.

Death Toll Rises

The bigger story is death loss in major feeding areas. Tindall says they've been getting numerous reports from customers that operate in the Central and Southern Plains ranging from a few to a few hundred head. "We've heard up to 300," Tindall says about the death loss, adding, "some on a percentage basis, I would say there's some yards that are at 3%; some are at 1%."

Northern Feedlots Hit the Worst

But the bigger losses have been in the Northern feedlots where cattle are usually larger in frame, fed to heavier weights and genetically are not bred for the heat.

Kyle Bumsted with Allendale is also a cattle producer in Ericson, Neb., and says it has turned into a crisis.

"Here in Nebraska and South Dakota, they've been taking the brunt of it as these cattle are bigger up here in the North, and they're not really maybe accustomed to the heat or the prolonged heat. It's been staying too hot at night in most instances, and these cattle just can't get cooled down," he says.

Bumsted says many feedlots had cattle sold with a plan to have those delivered before the heat set in. However, some of those cattle were pushed back by packers.

Death Toll in the Tens of Thousands

This has led to tens of thousands of cattle deaths from North to South and that number could grow if the heat is further prolonged.

"I'd say we're probably in the neighborhood of probably 15,000 to 20,000 right now," estimates Bumsted. "If we get another hot stretch, we could probably work that number up towards that 20,000 to 30,000 head very easily, especially from what I've been hearing."

While those are alarming numbers, Peel says they may not be a market mover: "That's a huge number, not really to affect the overall market, but obviously for the producers involved, it's a tremendous loss."

Financial Blow to Feedlots

The losses are always a blow to feedlots but especially in this high cattle price environment says Bumsted.

"Financially, yeah, it's definitely, it's big. You know, it depends on the size of the yard, how much they can absorb. But regardless, one is tough, but losing multiple is not good."

And Tindall concurs, "Obviously zero is too much in this market with what the cattle are worth but not real good."

Some feedlots or farmer feeder operations do have insurance, but not all, due to the high cost.

Little Reprieve in Sight

Unfortunately, the dangerous heat and humidity may persist according to USDA Meteorologist Brad Rippey.

Appearing on AgriTalk, Rippey details a hot forecast for cattle country for the next several days.

"As you get back to the High Plains region, we're just going to keep rolling along with a lot of this heat," he

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CATTLE DEATH TOLL CLIMBS WITH EXTREME HEAT AND HUMIDITY

summarizes. "There may be some occasional breaks as the monsoon wraps across out of the Southwest. But the overall theme here, I think, is a lot of humidity, a lot of heat continuing into August. Tough on livestock."

Peel says the forecast is a concern: "We may get a tiny respite this weekend based on the forecast I've seen, but then we're going to be right back in it again next week. So it could go here for quite some time."

And that could lead to additional cattle losses.

WHEN SUMMER GRASS STARTS RUNNING OUT OF GAS

By: Paul Beck, Oklahoma State University Extension Beef Cattle Nutrition Specialist

Perennial warm-season grasses can still look green in midsummer even as their nutritional value declines. Forage analysis from several Oklahoma forage systems shows that this change begins earlier than many producers expect.

Tallgrass prairie dominated by big and little bluestem, Indiangrass and switchgrass at the OSU Range Cow Research Center near Stillwater peaked in nutritive quality in May with 10.55% and 75% digestibility. After May, protein and digestibility declined steadily as forages mature with less than 6% crude protein and 65% digestibility in the late summer.

The same pattern has been observed in other warm-season pastures. In OSU data from midgrass prairie, crude protein declined from 9.8% in May to 7.1% in July, while total digestible nutrients declined from 64% to 61%. Old World bluestem declined even more sharply, from 12.9% crude protein and 60% TDN in May to 7.4% crude protein and 55% TDN in July.

One useful way to evaluate this change is the ratio of TDN to crude protein. Ratios between about 4:1 and 7:1 are generally considered balanced. When this ratio approaches 7:1 or above the crude protein is too low for optimal forage fiber breakdown in the rumen, limiting forage digestion and intake. In the early summer the TDN:CP ratio is 7:1, 6.5:1, and 4.6:1 for tallgrass prairie, midgrass prairie, and Old-World bluestem. But, July, the ratio had increased to 10.8:1 for tallgrass prairie, 8.6:1 for midgrass prairie and 7.4:1 for Old World bluestem, indicating that rumen-degradable protein was becoming limiting.

This determines the kind of supplement cattle need. When adequate standing forage remains but protein has declined, a pound of high-protein supplement increases microbial activity, fiber digestion, passage rate and forage intake; but only if adequate forage is available. This is the basis of the Oklahoma Gold supplementation program, where 1-pound of a high protein supplement (38 to 40% crude protein) increases late summer stocker gains by 0.4 to 0.5 pounds per day. This is a very efficient program requiring only 2 to 2.5 pounds of supplement for each pound of added gain. The Oklahoma SuperGold supplementation program is based on feeding 2.5 pounds per day of a moderate (25-30%) protein supplement to provide both protein and energy to the calf. This can improve daily gains by 0.6 to 0.7 pounds per day with supplement efficiency of around 3.5 pounds of supplement per pound of added gain.

If forage quantity is also limited, protein alone cannot replace missing forage. Higher levels of moderate protein-energy supplement will be needed to maintain performance and stocking rates. High feeding rates of supplements containing a large amount of grain can reduce forage intake and fiber digestion.

The first question should not be, "What supplement should I buy?" It should be, "What is limiting performance?" Forage testing provides the best answer, but pasture maturity, manure consistency, cattle fill and weight gain also provide clues. Start supplementation before gains fall sharply, match the supplement to forage quality and availability, and remember that the supplement that fits one forage—or one month—may be the wrong tool for another.

Paul Beck, OSU Extension beef cattle specialist, explains the key differences between the Oklahoma Gold Program and Super Gold Program to help Oklahoma beef producers determine which program best fits their operation. Learn the eligibility requirements, benefits, and practical considerations for selecting the right program to support your herd and management goals on SunUpTV from July 18, 2026. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uN7jOrC_YhI

CRITICAL CONTROL POINTS IN A COW-CALF OPERATION

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

One of the attributes of a commercial cow-calf operation is that the cows don't require day to day monitoring and management to do their job. Cows are very self-sufficient with regard to their ability to convert forage into pounds of weaned calves, even during the intense Oklahoma summer heat. That being said, there are some specific management practices that offer great return on investment. Depending on your calving season and schedule, each of the following (if not done yet) will pay off in the future.

- Growth implants
- Castration
- Dehorning
- Fly, tick and internal parasite control
- Administering the first (or second) round of vaccinations. Two rounds of vaccinations prior to weaning reduces stress at weaning and will set up calves for long-term health, growth and productivity. A documented vaccination protocol will pay dividends when marketing calves.

- Monitoring the availability of shade and water quality.
- Management to avoid heat stress. If working calves or moving cattle, do it at dawn and be done as early in the morning as possible.

- Balance the quality and quantity of hay harvested from native grass meadows. May was a fairly dry month across most of Oklahoma, June provided moisture but not much intense heat, as a result many native grass meadows are lagging behind in forage quantity at the time of this writing. Baling native grass meadows by early July is typically the sweet spot to optimize quality and quantity of hay produced. If you plan to bale native grass meadows, do it now. Waiting later into summer not only decreases quality but also potentially damages long-term health and productivity of native grass plants.

New World Screwworm Emergency Response

The New World Screwworm (NWS) Response Incident Playbook outlines eight key activities that help animal health officials and responders plan, adapt, and act across all phases of an outbreak—from preparedness to eradication. Together, these activities ensure a flexible, science-based approach that uses data to drive decisions at every stage and is tailored to local needs.

Response Strategy

	Protect uninfested animals by preventing contact with NWS flies.	Disrupt the NWS reproduction cycle to prevent establishment.	
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Key Activities

01 CARRY OUT A UNIFIED RESPONSE Coordinate a unified Federal and State response to detect, contain, and communicate about NWS, using USDA's emergency authorities and incident command structure.	02 PROTECT UNAFFECTED AREAS Establish infested and surveillance zones, implement quarantines, and launch rapid surveillance and tracing to contain and monitor NWS populations.	03 MANAGE INFESTED PREMISES Manage infested animals and premises following USDA and State guidelines, including NWS animal drugs/pesticides, humane euthanasia if needed, and approved disposal procedures.	04 MANAGE NWS IN WILDLIFE Coordinate with State, Federal, and Tribal partners to monitor, manage, and respond to NWS in wildlife through surveillance, and carcass disposal.
05 DEPLOY TRAPS AND STERILE FLIES Deploy traps and sterile flies to monitor, contain, and eliminate NWS, using surveillance data to guide zone adjustments and response actions.	06 FACILITATE HEALTHY ANIMAL MOVEMENT Use standardized guidance to authorize the movement of healthy animals and support continuity of business.	07 TRACK AND REPORT ACTIVITIES Use EMRS to track surveillance, sterile fly releases, and field data, and to support outbreak reporting, mapping, and international notifications.	08 ASSESS AND REPLENISH RESOURCES Continuously assess and request needed supplies, equipment, and personnel to support NWS response operations through EMRS and the National Veterinary Stockpile.

www.aphis.usda.gov/animal-emergencies

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With the threats to the cattle industry, you'll want to stay informed of what's on the horizon. Be sure your dues are paid to continue to receive your copy of the newsletter and all other membership benefits.

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