



BeefTalk 611: There Is Room for More Cows

SUPPORTING MATERIALS

2001 and 2011 Agricultural Statistics

	2001	2011
North Dakota Farms	30,300	31,900
Acres Farmed	39,400,000	39,600,000
Acres of Principle Crops	22,382,000	22,597,000
Acres of Hay Production	2,450,000	2,550,000

So there is room for more cows!

Today, the cattle business is just as real as it was at the turn of the century. However, the market, consumer and even the producer have not remained unchanged.

One advantage of keeping records is the ability to look back in time. Time changes everything, but that everything may be big for some and small for others.

The question asked more frequently today is: What is the future of the beef business? The question is not too difficult to answer. However, before one answers, it doesn't hurt to look back as well as forward.

Although those in the beef business are spread throughout the world, my little area is North Dakota, which is a great spot in the upper northern Great Plains.

The first point that needs to be noted is that the beef business does not stand alone. The beef business, which is the business of producing food to feed people, is a subset of agriculture. Therefore, one needs to look at the big picture of agriculture.

Using North Dakota as an example, the North Dakota Agricultural Statistics Service reported that in 2001, there were 30,300 farms that were farming 39.4 million acres out of a total of 44.2 million acres.

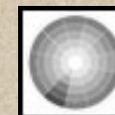
Ten years later, the 2011 report indicated there were 31,900 farms in North Dakota farming 39.6 million acres. Not a large difference.

In terms of principal crops, the 2001 report noted there were 22.4 million acres planted. In 2011, the report noted that there were 22.6 million acres planted to principal crops. Again, not a large difference. In terms of hay production, the 2001 report shows 2.5 million acres, while the 2011 report noted 2.6 million acres. Not a large difference.

Land mass and acres would not be expected to change. The use of those acres in terms of plants also does not seem to change much. The plant type may change in any given year, but the bulk of agriculture very obviously is plant-based, so maybe the statement that time changes everything is not true.



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Maybe the concern over decreased livestock production is not as significant as originally thought. Beef cattle need plants to live, so ample plants and plant products should mean plenty of beef cattle. However, if plant usage is looked at, one has to ask: Are the plants used for direct human use or routed through the livestock? The answer is critical.

Changes in the beef cow inventory should be indicative of any changes in the beef production units available to harvest plants through the cows. The 2001 North Dakota Agricultural Statistics Service report noted that there were more than 1 million beef cows in the state. The 2011 report showed there were 880,000 head. That is a drop of 122,000 beef cows since the turn of the century.

Ironically, crop production acres and acres of principal crops are up slightly. Also, the acres involved in hay production are up slightly. However, the number of milk cows dropped from 48,000 to 20,000. This means that milk cows are not eating the extra hay or crop production.

Cattle on feed in North Dakota were reported to be at 60,000 head in both 2001 and 2011, so the additional feedlot cattle are not consuming the additional forage.

Through time, maybe the cattle business has changed. Some would say the changes are big and others would say the changes are small, but the trend is that of an inventory reduction.

Even close to home at the Dickinson Research Extension Center, the county of Dunn had beef cow inventories of 56,000 cows in the 2001 report, but only 43,500 cows remained in the 2011 report. Essentially, one out of five cows that were present at the start of the century was gone by the end of the first decade. That is big.

However, historic numbers show that cattle numbers will fluctuate, so the current numbers certainly are not out of the range of previously low cattle numbers. Should we worry?

The bottom line is that cattle exist for a reason. They need to make money. In previous years, even though the land and feed bases were readily available, cattle numbers responded to market prices created by consumer demand. Feed resources do not dictate the number of cows that remain in the inventory. Market prices do and also have in the past.

The term "cattle cycle" was always in bold print in any discussion of cattle inventories, and the approximate 10-year cycle was a real presence in the cattle business.

Today, some would say the cattle cycle is not as prevalent in various discussions of the cattle business because the market would indicate an opportunity for more cows to be brought into production.

However, time does change everything, even the measures one records to try to predict change. Today, the cattle business is just as real as it was at the turn of the century. However, the market, consumer and even the producer have not remained unchanged.

Yes, the industry still has a rough, back-to-nature and real-food image, but few actually view, touch or even get close to the real cow herd. However, there still is food for cows and cows will need to eat that food because cow food is not human food.

We eat the beef and, as we speak, heifer numbers are up. In fact, as the century started, the beef replacement heifer inventory was 170,000 head. Ten years later, 185,000 heifers are waiting to be bred. That is good and so is the cow business. It's not going away.

May you find all your ear tags.

Your comments are always welcome at <http://www.BeefTalk.com>. For more information, contact the NDBCIA Office, 1041 State Ave., Dickinson, ND 58601, or go to <http://www.CHAPS2000.com> on the Internet.

