

**A LITTLE BIT COUNTRY
WARREN FROELICH
NDSU EXTENSION AGENT
WILLIAMS COUNTY**

Beef Cow Numbers Continue Decline

Record high prices for retail beef, feeder cattle, the feds, culls and breeding stock have one thing in common – tight supplies.

The recent report on the beef inventory in the United States shows all cattle and calves as of January 1, 2012 to be 90.8 million head. This is two percent below the 92.7 million from last year's numbers and is the lowest January 1 inventory of all cattle and calves since the 88.1 million on hand in 1952.

North Dakota is not immune to the national trend. According to the USDA, National Agricultural Statistics Service, and North Dakota Field Office, all cattle and calves as of January 1, 2012 totaled 1.69 million head which is down from 1.7 million head of one year ago. This is the fifth consecutive yearly decrease in herd size since January 1, 2007 when total inventory was 1.85 million head. For the current inventory, the only categories to show an increase were bulls weighting 500 pounds or more and calves under 500 pounds. All other categories decreased from the previous year, except milk replacement heifers 500 pounds and over and steers weighing 500 pounds or more, both of which showed no change from a year ago.

Beef cow numbers at the U.S. level numbered 29.9 million, down three percent from January 1, 2011. In North Dakota our beef cows totaled 862,000 head on January 1 representing a drop of 18,000 head from one year ago.

The dairy industry in North Dakota continues to spiral downward, dropping another 2,000 head of milk cows this past year while the national numbers were up one percent from January 1, 2011. The national milk cow herd now totals 9.2 million head or 23.5 percent of total cows. The present North Dakota Inventory of milk cows is 18,000.

The 2011 calf crop was estimated at 35.3 million head representing the smallest calf crop since the 34.9 million born during 1950.

With less inventory of the very basis of the industry, that is feeder cattle, one would think prices of this commodity will only strengthen. One cannot predict world political issues that may influence the beef market. Of more relevance to future feeder cattle markets is profitability of the people who finish them. The cattle feeders have been pricing calves "on-the-come" or expectations that the market will continue to climb. If this does not occur, the seller of feeder calves could very well see adjustments to feeder calf values.

A.I. Synchronization Protocols

For many beef producers, the 2012 calving season will soon be here. It is an exciting time of the year but also a time which can be very stressful as everyone realizes that calf mortality is important to year-end profitability.

About this time of year, most cattlemen are also preparing for the next breeding season which, for most, usually begins in June. For those who incorporate artificial insemination, I want to draw attention to some great information about protocols for synchronization of estrus and ovulation at www.beefrepro.unl.edu by a group calling themselves "The Beef Reproduction Task Force" which is a multi-state university extension activity in cooperation with the North Central Agriculture and Natural Resources Program Leaders Committee, and the Cooperative State Research Education and Extension Service.

At this website you can download an Estrus Synchronization Planner, compliments of Iowa State University. Also at this site are great resources for past Applied Reproductive Strategies in Beef Cattle Symposium. A link to this site can be found on our web page www.ag.ndsu.edu/williamscountyextension.