

# Arkansas Cattle Numbers Decline Faster Than The National Trend

**LITTLE ROCK, ARK.** The number of beef cattle in the U.S. declined for the seventh straight year, and the rate of decline in 2012 was faster for Arkansas than the rest of the nation – a trend that could mean higher prices for that lunchtime burger.

According to the National Agricultural Statistics Service, the U.S. beef cow herd was down 3 percent, or 862,000 to 29.3 million head on Jan. 1 of this year. Arkansas saw a 6 percent decline in 2012 from 909,000 to 851,000.

Across the United States the number of dairy cows was unchanged but the number of dairy cows in Arkansas decreased 18 percent from 11,000 in 2012 to 9,000 in 2013.

“Severe drought across the state is the primary reason for the decline in cattle numbers,” said Tom Troxel, associate head-Animal Science, for the University of Arkansas System Division of Agriculture. “Without forage to support herds and hay hard to come by, many ranchers sold off cattle they couldn’t support.”

For the U.S., all cattle and calves, including dairy, numbered 89. 3 million head, down 2 percent from the previous year, and the lowest cattle inventory since 1952.

“This marks the sixth consecutive year for a decline in the total cattle inventory,” Troxel said. “Over the past six years the total cattle inventory has declined by 7.3 million head. In Arkansas, all cattle and calves were down 4 percent to 1.60 million head for the same time period.”

## A year of unwanted records

Unfortunately, the 2013 numbers mark many superlatives for the cattle industry. Most of them negative.

“It’s the seventh year in a row for a decline in the beef cow herd and the 15th out of the last 17 years in which the U.S. beef cow herd has declined,” he said. “This is the longest consecutive decline in beef cow number in history.”

There were no gains in the U.S. 2012 calf crop, either.

“It is estimated to be estimated at 34.3 million head, down 3 percent, from 2011,” Troxel said. “This is the smallest calf crop since 1949.”

The Arkansas 2012 calf crop was estimated at 760,000 head, which was down 5 percent from the previous year.

“The big question is how much will the 2013 calf crop will be affected due to the weather of 2012?” he said. “Many believe the 2013 calf crop will be even smaller.”

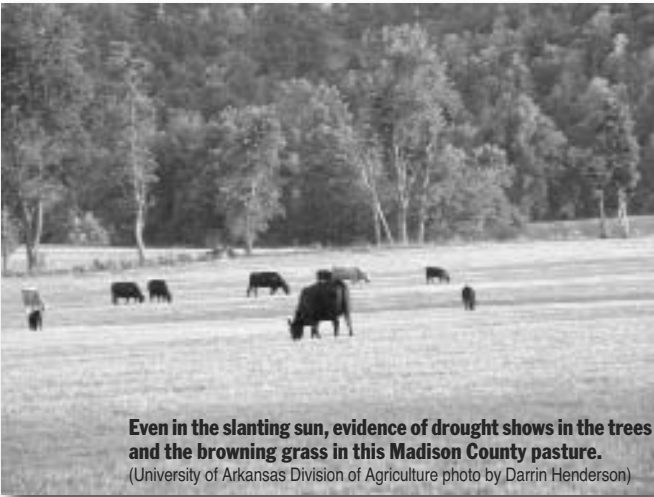
It’s easy to see where drought’s big footprint has been: the Texas beef cow numbers decreased by 12 percent, Kansas by 8 percent, Colorado by 6 percent and Missouri decreased

by 5 percent. In states where the rain came, numbers increased: Illinois and Idaho up 9 percent, North Dakota, up 7 percent, and South Dakota up 5 percent.

Nationally beef replacement heifers were up 2 percent to 5.4 million head and the same trend was true for Arkansas, where beef replacement heifers were up 12 percent to 129,000.

## Bigger burger prices

With long-term climate projections that see drought continuing, “even though the market prices are signaling to expand, most Arkansas producers are not looking to expand their beef



Even in the slanting sun, evidence of drought shows in the trees and the browning grass in this Madison County pasture. (University of Arkansas Division of Agriculture photo by Darrin Henderson)



Conway county beef cattle pasture  
By Kevin Quinn, extension video specialist

herds but rather to maintain their current herd size,” Troxel said.

What does this mean to the consumer?

“Beef and veal prices will continue to climb in 2013,” he said. “Before retail prices will come down, supply must increase, and significant cow herd rebuilding isn’t forecasted until 2015 or later.”

Right now, “this should result in good calf prices for the cow-calf producer,” Troxel said. “There should be good profits ahead for the cow-calf producers as long as they can control cost and Mother Nature cooperates.” Δ



Link Directly To: **AGROTAIN**



Link Directly To: **VERMEER**