

# U.S. Cattle Number Down, But Arkansas Cattle Numbers Rise

**LITTLE ROCK, ARK.**

**T**he number of cattle nationwide declined to 93.7 million head in January, the smallest since 1959, but Arkansas is continuing to buck the trend, with the January count up 4 percent from the year-earlier count to 1.89 million head, according to the National Agricultural Statistics Service.

"The Arkansas cattle inventory has been increasing since 2006, where the national cattle inventory has been declining since 2007," said Tom Troxel, associate department head for animal science for the University of Arkansas Division of Agriculture.

Beef cows declined 1 percent to 31.4 million head as of Jan. 1. Even though beef cow slaughter was down from the year prior, it was still large enough to lead to liquidation.

"Nationally speaking, beef producers have yet to show any appetite for expansion," Troxel said. "The number of heifers held back in 2009 for beef herd replacements was 5.4 million head, 1.7 percent lower than a year ago.

"Beef cow replacement numbers have declined for four consecutive years," he said. "There is an outside chance we could see an increase in herd replacement numbers in 2010, but much will depend on what happens with corn and feed prices."

In Arkansas, the calf crop for the full year of 2009 was 810,000 head, up 4 percent. All cows and heifers that have calved, at 950,000 head, were up 3 percent in January 2010 and beef cows were at 937,000 head, up 3 percent. All heifers weighing 500 pounds and more were up 2 percent to 270,000 head. Steers were up 7 percent at 155,000 head and calves weighing less than 500 pounds were up 8 percent to 455,000 head.

"During 2008 and 2009, Arkansas experienced above-normal rainfall, producing larger-than-normal amounts of forage," Troxel said. "This, along with softer selling prices in 2009, caused Arkansas beef producers to keep extra heifers and steers to graze excess forage to improve weights – and hopefully – profits."

Some of the heifers were retained into the breeding herd. According to the Arkansas Livestock and Poultry Commission, the number of heifers vaccinated for brucellosis was almost 1 percent higher in 2009 than in 2008, also indicating a potential for Arkansas cattle producers' to increase herd size.



**Calves enjoy a sunny day in April 2009 at the Livestock and Forestry Branch Station of the University of Arkansas Division of Agriculture.**

University of Arkansas Division of Agriculture photo by Tom Troxel.

"Arkansas beef cattle producers may be a step ahead of the nation," Troxel said. "With the smaller national herd, and hopefully an increase in demand for beef both domestically and foreign, beef prices are expected to be \$3 to \$4 per hundredweight higher in 2010 than in 2009.

"That is equal to \$15 to \$20 [more] per 500-pound calf," he said.

Prices for corn and feed are also expected to be lower in 2010 than in 2009.

"With the increase in selling prices, decrease in feed prices, and more calves to sell, Arkansas cattle producers may have a better year economically in 2010 than in 2009," Troxel said.

The 2010 cattle and calf inventory is nowhere near the record numbers set in 1975. In 1975 there were 2.68 million all cattle and calves, 1.35 million cows and heifers that calve and 1.26 million beef cows. △

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