

Weather Will Determine Direction Of Cattle Industry

COLUMBIA, MO.

The cattle industry in Missouri is a big deal with 59,000 farms in the state raising cattle. That’s why the University of Missouri’s 2013 Breimyer Seminar focused on the future of the Missouri cattle industry.

“The question we’re talking about is where is the industry headed,” says Ron Plain, MU Extension agricultural economist and professor in the MU College of Agriculture, Food and Natural Resources. “Are we going to have continuing decline in cattle numbers or are we going to turn it around? The direction we’re headed has implications for not only rural Missouri but for all Missourians because a lot of tax base and a lot of jobs come with these cattle numbers.”

Historically, cattle have been the No. 1 product from Missouri farms, but in recent years cattle have slipped to No. 3 behind soybeans and corn. The U.S. cattle inventory is currently the smallest it has been since 1952. Cattle numbers increased for nearly 200 years but since 1975 have been decreasing.

Plain says the biggest thing that will determine which direction the cattle industry goes is

the weather.

“If we have drought like last year, cattle numbers will be forced down because the feed is not there,” Plain says. “If we have a good summer, plenty of rain and lots of grass, then the economics kick in. It is profitable to raise cattle and we will get herd expansion.”

Once you get past the weather, other factors matter such as consumer demand for beef and exports, but they don’t have quite the unpredictability of the next month's weather, Plain says.

So far in 2013, the weather has been favorable for grass growth, and with a good forage supply cattlemen are likely to retain more heifers and cows for breeding this fall. However, it will take another year for the increased breeding herd to make an impact. The turnaround won’t happen overnight.

“For the time being, we’re still going to go down,” Plain says. “The number of bred cows and heifers this year is 2.1 percent lower than last year, meaning a smaller calf crop this year.”

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