

# 2015 beef production smaller than expected so far

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USDA estimates beef production through the end of February to be down 5.2 percent from the same period last year. Total cattle slaughter is down 7.0 percent year over year including a 6.4 percent decrease in steer slaughter and a 8.7 percent decrease in heifer slaughter. Total cow slaughter is down 6.6 percent including a 4.0 percent increase in dairy cow slaughter and a 17.9 percent decrease in beef cow slaughter.

Overall cattle carcass weights are currently 20 pounds above year ago levels. Average cattle carcass weights are a function of both the carcass weights of various classes of cattle and also the composition of slaughter by class of cattle. Currently, steer carcass weights are up 19 pounds over last year and heifer carcass weights are up 15 pounds. Cow carcass weights are up 29 pounds year over year mostly the result of more dairy cows in the cow slaughter total. So far this year dairy cows represent 58 percent of total cow slaughter compared to 52 percent one year ago.

Increased steer and heifer carcass weights reflect feedlot response to market conditions the past several months. Feedlot inventories have been slightly above year earlier levels since November, mostly as a result of delayed feedlot marketings of cattle. Total feedlot placements of cattle the past six months are down 3.8 percent year over year. In the same six months, feedlot marketings are down 7.2 percent. Data from Kansas feedlots shows that feedlots fed cattle an extra 16 days the past six months compared to the same period a year earlier. This led to increased final weights despite the fact that placement weights were smaller. Interestingly, feedlot performance was poorer during the past six months with decreased average daily gains, increased feed/gain ratios and increased death loss.

What to expect in the coming months? Fed cattle marketings typically increase seasonally from February to June. Current estimates suggest that total marketings will increase seasonally through May but could be slightly smaller than the same period last year with February and March marketings up slightly year over year and down from year ago levels in April and May. Carcass weights also typically decline to

seasonal lows in April or May. While feedlots to have some incentive to feed cattle longer, winter weather may pull cattle and carcass weights down faster than expected in March. The current cold and snow across much of the country will have impacts in the majority of cattle feeding areas.

Winter weather may have also affected February feedlot placements. In Oklahoma, combined auction receipts in February were down 17 percent from last year with auction volumes down 47 percent in the last two weeks of February, in part due to adverse weather and road conditions. Though some wheat pasture cattle moved to market in late January and early February, some wheat pasture cattle may have been pushed into early March. Most wheat in Oklahoma is at or near first hollow stem and c