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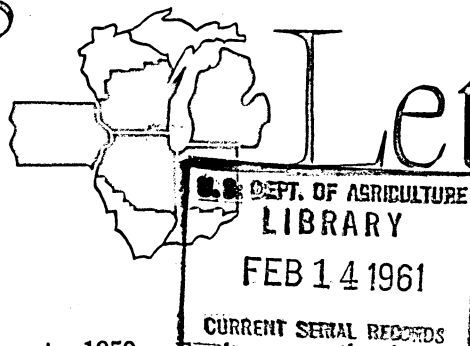
# Agricultural Letter

January 13, 1961

**CATTLE NUMBERS** reported by the 1959 Census of Agriculture are lower than the inventory estimates prepared by the Crop Reporting Board of the U. S. Department of Agriculture. From 1954 to 1959 the Census showed a decline of nearly 2 million head of cattle for the 42 states currently reported, while the USDA inventory for these states on January 1, 1960, was over 3 million greater than five years earlier.

Although at first glance the USDA estimates would seem to need a downward revision of nearly 6 per cent, several factors indicate the actual difference from the Census figures may be somewhat smaller. First, the definition of a farm was changed in the 1959 Census to be more restrictive, thus eliminating 6 per cent of the farms which would have qualified under the old definition. However, since the farms eliminated are small (most of them under 10 acres in size), their exclusion reduces only slightly the Census cattle numbers. Second, the 1959 Census was taken somewhat later in the fall when heavy slaughter and low rates of calving normally bring seasonal declines in the livestock population.

The greatest significance for cattle producers of the lower Census numbers is the indication of a relatively moderate build-up of numbers in the present cattle cycle. Not only were total numbers in 1959 somewhat below 1954, but the number of cows in the beef-breeding herd was just slightly larger than in 1954. Only in the South did the Census count significantly more beef cows



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in 1959. Furthermore, the increase in the South more than offset declines in the West.

Another important factor is that cattle numbers in the Plains and Western states are below the 1954 levels. This would indicate the build-up in cattle numbers has not overtaxed range capacity. Thus, the potential number of cattle available for slaughter in the near future—both under normal conditions and if widespread drought were to develop in the range areas—is significantly smaller than thought earlier.

These changes not only reduce the potential cyclical rise in slaughter and decline in prices, they also indicate the present cycle may be lengthened. The rising levels of cow and calf slaughter provide further evidence of a moderation in the rate of build-up in cattle numbers which also means a “stretching out” of the cycle. The current cycle, therefore, may be longer and the slaughter and price fluctuations less severe than previous cycles.

Census of Agriculture indicates cattle numbers in 1959 fell below USDA inventory estimates

	Cows Kept for Milk			Other cows			Other Cattle and Calves			All Cattle		
	1954	1959	Change	1954	1959	Change	1954	1959	Change	1954	1959	Change
..... (million head) .....												
United States (42 states included)												
Census	18.2	14.9	-3.3	21.7	21.8	+0.1	44.1	45.6	+1.5	84.0	82.3	-1.7
USDA*	21.0	18.8	-2.2	22.3	23.4	+1.1	42.1	46.5	+4.4	85.4	88.6	+3.2
Great Plains and West (14 out of 17 states included)												
Census	3.5	2.6	-0.9	13.9	13.7	-0.2	19.9	20.7	+0.8	37.3	36.9	-0.4
USDA*	4.1	3.5	-0.6	14.5	15.1	+0.6	18.7	20.9	+2.2	37.2	39.6	+2.4
Corn Belt and Lake States (8 states included)												
Census	8.3	7.0	-1.3	3.8	3.8	0	15.8	16.8	+1.0	27.9	27.6	-0.3
USDA*	9.5	8.6	-0.9	3.8	3.9	+0.1	15.4	17.6	+2.2	28.8	30.1	+1.3
South (11 out of 14 states included)												
Census	3.4	2.6	-0.8	3.9	4.2	+0.3	6.0	5.9	-0.1	13.3	12.7	-0.6
USDA*	3.9	3.4	-0.5	3.9	4.1	+0.2	6.0	5.9	-0.1	13.8	13.5	-0.3
Northeast (9 states included)												
Census	3.0	2.7	-0.3	.1	.2	+0.1	2.4	2.2	-0.2	5.5	5.0	-0.5
USDA*	3.5	3.3	-0.2	.1	.2	+0.1	2.1	2.0	-0.1	5.7	5.5	-0.2

\* U.S. Department of Agriculture inventory on January 1 of following year; 1955 revised.

NOTE: Totals may not add due to rounding.