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Some Facts on the Cattle Situation

The recent decline in cattle prices again has raised a question regarding the outlook for the cattle business.

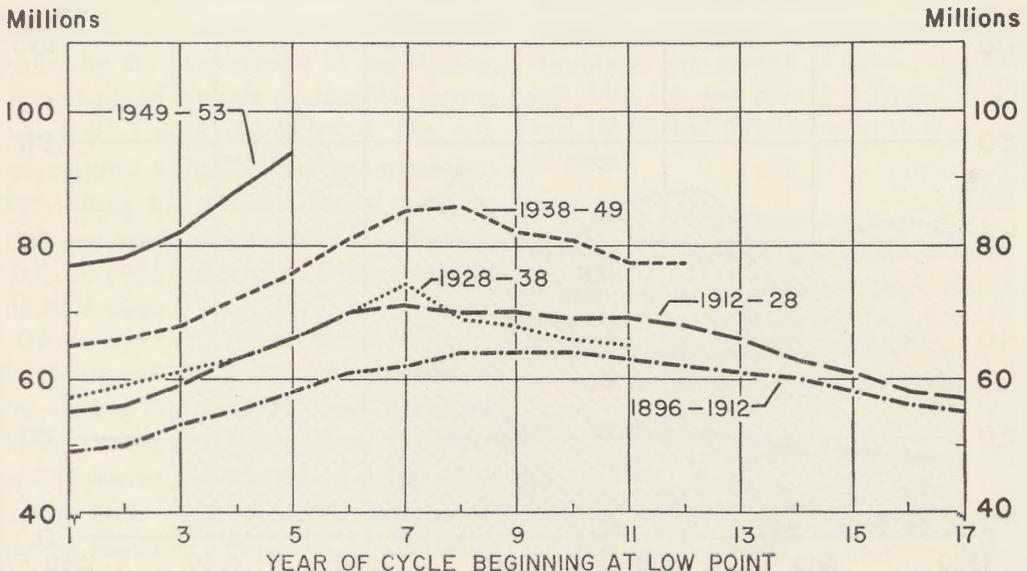
The average price received by Texas farmers for beef cattle declined from \$15 to \$11 per hundredweight between mid-May and mid-June, according to the Bureau of Agricultural Economics. Most of this decline occurred on the lower grades of slaughter cattle, stocker and feeder cattle, and cows. Prices of Choice and Prime slaughter cattle and calves continued the downward trend that had been particularly significant since the first of the

year. However, price losses during the past 2 months on these grades of slaughter cattle amounted to only \$1 to \$2 per hundredweight.

On the other hand, prices for breeding cattle and cutter and canner cows dropped very sharply. Cutters and cannors sold as low as \$5 per hundredweight recently, and it was reported that several loads of fairly high-quality breeding cows with calves sold in the neighborhood of \$80 per pair.

The severe drought in the Southwest undoubtedly was an important factor in this

CATTLE ON FARMS, JANUARY 1, BY CATTLE CYCLES
UNITED STATES



Source: U S Department of Agriculture.

price decline. However, the sharp decline in values has raised a question in the minds of many people regarding the future of the cattle business, even if drought-breaking rains should occur. Hence, it seems appropriate to take a look at some of the more pertinent facts in the cattle situation.

Strong Demand Continues

During the first 6 months of 1953, consumers bought about 34 percent more beef than during the first half of 1952. It is now estimated that the per capita consumption of beef for 1953 may exceed the record high of 73 pounds in 1909. This high per capita consumption reflects a strong consumer demand for beef, backed up by a continuing high level of incomes, and a substantial decline in the amount of pork available. Total meat consumption is up only moderately. Present indications are that this level of incomes and the strong demand for beef will continue at least through 1953.

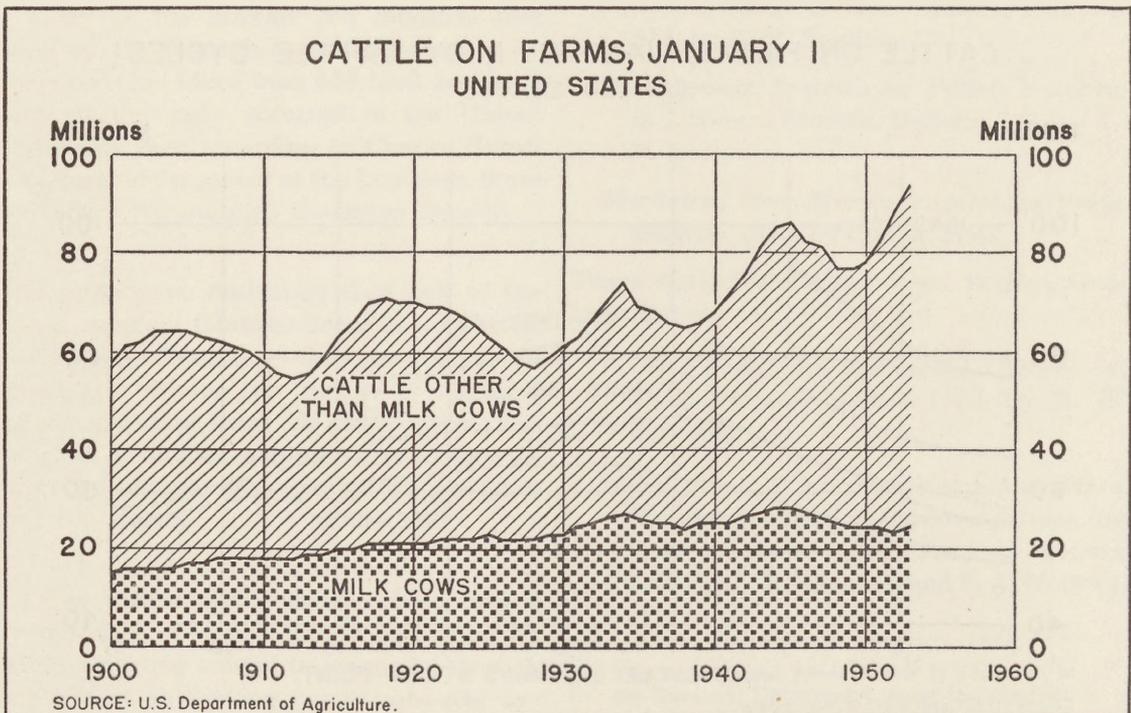
Another factor contributing to a strong demand for beef is the growing population of the country. At the present growth rate, the

population is increasing about 7,000 persons per day. A national population of 170,000,000 is forecast by 1960.

Supply of Beef Increases

As indicated by the higher per capita consumption, the supply of beef has increased rapidly during the past year. This larger supply stems in part from recent heavy marketings because of the drought but also, and more importantly, from the increasing number of cattle produced as a result of the record number of cattle and calves on farms. On January 1, 1953, there were 93,696,000 head of cattle on the Nation's farms and ranches, according to the United States Department of Agriculture. This number of cattle is producing an annual calf crop estimated at about 35,000,000 head. In 1952 the total number of cattle and calves slaughtered was just short of 28,000,000; hence, there was a substantial increase in the inventory of cattle and calves during the calendar year 1952.

Obviously, cattle numbers will continue to increase until the rate of slaughter equals or exceeds the size of the annual calf crop, with



allowances made for death losses. The accompanying chart showing the trend of cattle numbers during the past five cattle cycles indicates that it usually takes about 7 years to complete the upward side of the cycle and from 6 to 8 years for the downward side. The regularity of this cycle is illustrated by the chart showing cattle numbers, by years, since 1900. Last fall the Department of Agriculture estimated that the peak in cattle numbers would come about 1955 and would be about 100,000,000 head.

Cattle slaughter during the first 6 months of this year has been about 34 percent larger than during the corresponding period of 1952. During the months of May and June it is estimated that Federally inspected slaughter of beef was 66 percent greater in southwestern states, 74 percent higher in the Southeast, and 44 percent higher for the Nation than during May and June of 1952. If slaughter of cattle for the calendar year 1953 exceeds that for 1952 by as much as 26 percent, it will be about equal to the annual calf crop.

These figures suggest that the recent high rate of slaughter, resulting in part from forced liquidation because of the drought, may bring a halt to the upward trend in cattle numbers earlier than expected. It now appears possible that the peak may occur earlier and that total numbers may not reach the 100,000,000 mark estimated by the Department of Agriculture. Much depends on the rate of slaughter during the last half of 1953 and in 1954. The rate of increase over a year ago may be somewhat smaller during the second half of 1953 in view of the relatively heavy marketings in the fall of 1952, especially if the drought should be broken.

Marketings of fed cattle are expected to decline during the next few months, according to the United States Department of Agriculture. However, the number of cattle going to market from pastures and ranges is expected to increase during the late summer and fall months.

With respect to prices, a July 6 release of the Department of Agriculture states that a moderate seasonal increase in prices of top-grade slaughter steers appears probable in the months ahead. Prices of grass cattle are expected to remain seasonally low and continue erratic for several months.

Pastures Need Mowing

It has been said that good pastures cannot be produced without the use of a mowing machine. Mr. E. M. Trew, pasture specialist for the Texas Agricultural Extension Service, points out that proper mowing of pastures may increase their productivity two or three times.

Mowing can practically eliminate weeds, sprouts, brushes, briars, and vines, enabling the grasses to produce more forage. Mr. Trew suggests that the weeds be mowed when they first begin to bloom. During the blooming period, plants are weakest, and mowing at this time usually will give a better kill. The job should not be delayed until seeds have formed.

Some farmers prefer to set the cutter bar of the mower fairly high for the first mowing, in order to avoid cutting the grasses. Later in the season, lower clippings usually are recommended. Cutting the tops of mature grasses stimulates new growth of more palatable forage. Also, the new growth is higher in protein and, hence, will produce more milk or pounds of gain.

In tests at the Texas Angleton Experiment Station, Bermuda grass pastures that were mowed produced twice as much forage and four times as much protein as unmowed pastures. These tests also show that the tall bunch grasses should be cut as high as possible.

New, high-yielding castor bean hybrids are expected to be ready for southwestern farmers next spring.

Sweet Potato Storage Profitable



Storage houses for sweet potatoes have proved profitable for growers in most years. With an increased acreage this year, sweet potato growers are urged to provide storage facilities for at least a part of their crop, in order to avoid unusually heavy marketings at harvest time. Sharp price declines may occur unless marketing of the crop is spread over several months.

Proper storage facilities are necessary for orderly marketing, and their use could mean a saving of at least a million dollars annually to sweet potato growers, according to John A. Cox, Extension horticulturist of Louisiana State University.

Growers who do not have storage facilities available will find it profitable to make arrangements between now and harvest time to store at least a part of their anticipated sweet potato crop. Storage houses that were in operation last year should be cleaned out as soon as the crop has been sold. Old sweet potatoes, parts of potatoes, and other debris should be taken from the storage houses and destroyed by burning.

After cleaning, the walls, floors, bins, and crates in the houses should be sprayed with a mixture of DDT and bluestone, using 4 pounds of 50-percent wettable DDT and 2 pounds of bluestone to 50 gallons of water. Spraying the storage houses with the mixture will kill the spores of fungi causing the various rots that affect sweet potatoes in storage, and it also will help control sweet potato weevils.

A ton of barnyard manure will furnish approximately 10 pounds of nitrogen, 2 pounds of phosphorus, 8 pounds of potash, and a ton of organic matter — all essential elements for profitable crop production.

New Rice Variety

A new rice variety that shows excellent promise for the Louisiana-Texas Rice Belt has been developed by plant breeders at the Louisiana Experiment Station.

The new variety is called Sunbonnet and is being grown on considerable acreage in Louisiana this year. Tests show that it can be expected to excel the widely grown Bluebonnet variety in yield per acre and perhaps in mill yield of whole kernels. Sunbonnet also gives better stands and has higher resistance to a leafspot disease of rice.

Publications

Oklahoma Agricultural Experiment Station, Stillwater:

Chemical Control of Weeds in Cotton, Bulletin No. B-397, by W. C. Elder and others.

Texas Agricultural Experiment Station, College Station:

Castor Bean Production and Variety Trials in Texas, 1952, Progress Report 1571, by D. Donald Poole and D. L. Van Horn.

Chemical Defoliation and Regrowth Inhibition in Cotton, Bulletin 759, by W. C. Hall and others.

Cotton Yields in El Paso Valley as Influenced by Time of Application of Ammonium Nitrate and Superphosphate, 1952, Progress Report 1534, by P. D. Christensen and P. J. Lyerly.

Cotton Yields at Pecos as Influenced by Time of Application of Ammonium Nitrate and Superphosphate, 1952, Progress Report 1535, by P. D. Christensen and others.

Influence of Press Wheels on Stands of Cotton, Progress Report 1533, by H. P. Smith and E. C. Brown.

The *Agricultural News Letter* is prepared in the Research Department under the direction of CARL H. MOORE, Agricultural Economist.