

Documenting grazing results through monitoring

By DOUG WARNOCK
For the Capital Press

Using their U.S. Forest Service grazing permits was a fear expressed by Washington ranchers as reported in the March 31 issue of the Capital Press. This situation illustrates the need for livestock managers to document rangeland trends and overall range health through their own monitoring program. The article mentioned that monitoring was taking place, but some of the permittees were not involved in that process.

Monitoring pays. It is a valuable management tool and a means of documenting the outcome of the current management.

How does a livestock manager get a monitoring program started?

Monitoring can be very extensive or quite simple, but getting useful information is the key. To get started, the manager needs to determine what information will be the most useful. Exactly what specific things need to be evaluated? A person with considerable experience in rangeland monitoring can be very helpful with this. Talk to a Natural Resources Conservation Service range specialist or an extension range specialist to help you get started.

A variety of monitoring programs is available. Some require a significant amount of time and if the manager can't allocate that much time, it may be necessary to hire an experienced person or firm to do the monitoring. That decision must be made by the individual manager. The important element is that the monitoring program selected provides information that will be the most useful in making management decisions and documenting the results of the management being applied.

The most simple monitoring system is to establish permanent photo points and take photos every year. These photos, coupled with written observations, give a basic record of what is taking place.

The monitoring program you choose should assess the

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four ecosystem processes, i.e. the water cycle, mineral cycle, the composition and trends of the plant community and the solar energy flow. The solar energy flow is a measurement of how well the plants are utilizing sunlight to produce plant growth and development.

Grazing cages are useful. They prevent grazing in a small area so that at the end of the growing season one can clip and weigh the forage produced and calculate the year's production, as well as determine how much forage was removed by grazing that year. A 4-foot-square wire cage with a wire top can be made from livestock panels. It must be staked down so that animals can't move it. The grazing cage should be relocated at the end of the growing season, so that only one year's growth and utilization is measured.

An all-weather rain gauge is a useful tool. Some of the newer rain gauges are made of material that will not freeze and break. Just knowing whether the accumulated precipitation is above average, average or below average is helpful in evaluating changes that have occurred.

Additional kinds of measurements and evaluations can be made to provide a more comprehensive assessment of trends and general rangeland health. A practical monitoring program allows the manager to track what is happening and to make good decisions based on the condition and health of the plant communities in that land base.

If you, as a rangeland manager, do not already have a monitoring program, this spring is a good time to establish one. See your rangeland specialist.

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U.S. meat exports maintain strong pace

By CAROL RYAN DUMAS
Capital Press

February exports of U.S. beef and pork were well above last year's levels, adding to a strong start for 2017 shipments.

Pork exports, at 197,025 metric tons, were up 15 percent year over year, posting the strongest February volume on record. The value of those exports was up 17 percent to \$486.7 million, according to the U.S. Meat Export Federation.

February beef exports were up 9 percent year over year, at 90,417 metric tons, with value up 16 percent to \$508.5 million.

February exports accounted for 27.6 percent of U.S. pork production, up from 23.8 percent year over year, and 12.6 percent of U.S. beef production, which held steady with year-earlier levels.

Those exports added an average value of \$51.94 per hog slaughtered in the U.S. and \$276.96 per head of fed cattle slaughtered. Those values are up 18 percent and 13 percent, respectively, year over year.

"With trade deficits being

U.S. meat exports, Jan.-Feb.

Quantity (Metric tons)			
Item*	2016	2017	Percent change
Beef	165,504	189,905	14.7%
Pork	338,423	399,692	18.1
Lamb and mutton	1,801	1,060	-41.1
Value (Millions of dollars)			
Item*	2016	2017	Percent change
Beef	875.1	1,024	17%
Pork	819.1	995.3	21.5
Lamb and mutton	2.81	2.68	-4.3

*All items include variety meats.

Source: USDA (data compiled by U.S. Meat Export Federation) Capital Press graphic

a hot topic of conversation, especially with countries such as Mexico, China and Japan, it's important to highlight the sectors in which U.S. products are competitive throughout the world and exports are thriving," Philip Seng, USMEF president and CEO, said in a press release accompanying the latest export numbers.

Red meat is certainly in that category, he said.

For the first two months of the year, pork exports were up 18 percent in volume and 22 percent in value at 399,692 metric tons and \$995.3 million. Beef exports

were up 13 percent in volume and 17 percent in value at 186,905 metric tons and \$102 billion.

Japan led U.S. beef purchases in both volume and value for January-February — accounting for 46,276 metric tons, up 41 percent year over year — and \$259.6 million in value, a 44 percent increase.

Mexico topped the list of pork purchases in volume at 137,396 metric tons, up 27 percent, but was second to Japan in value at \$244.7 million. Exports to Japan, at 63,775 metric tons, up 10 percent, were about half

those to Mexico but valued at \$256.1 million, a 14 percent increase.

Chilled beef to Japan, South Korea and Taiwan continue to drive export growth in 2017, with a 60 percent increase in Japan, a 95 percent increase in Korea and a 12 percent increase in Taiwan, USMEF reported.

Total beef exports to those countries on a volume basis were up 41 percent in Japan, 23 percent in South Korea and 28 percent in Taiwan. The value of those exports increased 44 percent in Japan, 31 percent in South Korea and 25 percent in Taiwan for a total of \$462.5 million.

Beef exports within North America are also off to a solid start in 2017, with Mexico increasing 14 percent in volume in January-February and trade with Canada rebounding for an 11 percent increase year over year.

The value of those exports increased 3 percent in Mexico and 18 percent in Canada for a total of \$270.9 million.

The picture in Hong Kong is not as pretty, with beef imports down 21 percent in volume and 12 percent in value.

For more details, visit: www.usmef.org

Spot butter price hovers near \$2; benchmark milk price drops

By LEE MIELKE
For the Capital Press

Cash block cheese closed the first Friday of April at \$1.46 per pound, down 6 cents, reversing three weeks of gains, but is 4 cents above a year ago.

The barrels finished at \$1.4350, down 3 1/2-cents on the week and 1 3/4-cents above a year ago. Three cars of block traded hands on the week and a whopping 40 of barrel.

The blocks were unchanged Monday and Tuesday, while the barrels lost three-quarters-cent Monday and held Tuesday at \$1.4275.

Dairy Market News reports that milk is readily available for cheese producers in the Midwest and spot milk prices were running \$1.50 to \$5 under class.

Cheese production in the

Dairy Markets

Lee Mielke



West is also strong as milk continues to be readily available. Inventories are increasing while domestic demand is "a little lackluster" and "exports have been a little slow to develop."

CME butter closed Friday at \$2.0975 per pound, down a penny on the week and 2 1/4-cents below a year ago.

It dropped 2 cents Monday, under 16 loads trading hands, and dipped to \$2.0775, the lowest spot price since Dec. 9, 2016. While some see it flirting with the \$2 level, it regained a penny and a quarter Tuesday, inching to \$2.09.

Open-outcry for butter ended Friday at the CME and joined nonfat dry milk in electronic trading Monday.

Some Central region butter producers report production is lighter than in previous weeks while others continue at the same level.

Demand for Western butter is still good as the spring holidays approach but buyers are trying not to take on more butter than immediate needs.

Grade A CME nonfat dry milk, after holding all week at 80 cents per pound, inched up a penny Friday to close at 81 cents, 12 cents above a year ago.

The powder was unchanged Monday but gained a penny and a half Tues-

day, hitting 82 1/2-cents per pound.

Benchmark drops \$1.07

The March Federal order Class III benchmark milk price dropped to \$15.81 per hundredweight (cwt.), down \$1.07 from February but \$2.07 above March 2016. It is the lowest Class III price since October 2016 and equates to \$1.36 per gallon, down from \$1.45 in February and compares to \$1.18 a year ago. The First Quarter Class III price average stands at \$16.49, up from \$13.75 at this time a year ago and \$15.73 in 2015.

Monday's Class III futures settlements portended an April price of \$15.10; May, \$15.02; and June, \$15.18, with a peak of \$16.42 in September.

The March Class IV price is \$14.32, down \$1.27 from February, \$1.58 above a year ago, and the lowest since November 2016. The First Quarter Class IV average stands at \$15.37, up from \$13.18 a year ago and \$13.62 in 2015.

California Class I down

California's May Class I milk price is \$16.65 per cwt. for the north and \$16.92 for the south. They are down 11 and 12 cents, respectively, from April. Both are \$1.81 above May 2016, but are the lowest Class I prices since November 2016.

The five month average

for the north stands at \$17.79, up from \$15.67 at this time a year ago and compares to \$17.45 in 2015. The southern average, at \$18.06, is up from \$15.94 a year ago and \$17.72 in 2015.

Milk output to rise

The Agriculture Department lowered its 2017 milk production forecast in its latest World Agricultural Supply and Demand Estimates report as "reductions in milk per cow offset increases in milk cow numbers."

2017 production and marketings were projected at 217.3 billion and 216.3 billion pounds, respectively, down 200 million pounds from last month. If realized, 2017 production would be up 4.9 billion pounds, or 2.3 percent, from 2016.

Dairy product price forecasts for cheese, butter, nonfat dry milk and whey were lowered as both domestic and international supplies are large. As a result Class III and Class IV price forecasts were reduced.

The Class III milk price is projected to range from \$16.10 to \$16.60 per cwt., down from the \$16.60-\$17.20 expected a month ago, and compares to \$14.87 in 2016 and \$15.80 in 2015.

The Class IV price forecast is expected to average \$14.30-\$14.90, down from \$14.85-\$15.55 predicted last month, and compares to \$13.77 in 2016 and \$14.35 in 2015.



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