

Beef, long tops in Malheur County, now No. 1

Strong cattle prices over past few years

By KRISTI ALBERTSON
The Argus Observer

JAMIESON — For the first time in two decades, beef is Oregon's No. 1 agricultural commodity.

The Oregon Department of Agriculture announced this summer that cattle and calves claimed the top spot in 2014, unseating greenhouse and nursery products. It was good news for ranchers who have been bolstered by strong demand and stronger prices for the last couple of years.

In 2014, the industry brought in about \$922 million statewide — up 38 percent from 2013. Malheur County, in Eastern Oregon, was responsible for nearly \$250 million.

"There have been some very strong cattle prices the last couple of years, and that is reflected in the value of production for cattle and calves," said Kathryn Walker, special assistant to the director of the state agriculture department.

There are three primary compo-

nents of the industry — feedlots, cow-calf operations and slaughterhouses, said Doug Maag, whose family has been ranching in the Jamieson area since the 1930s.

Six months ago, slaughterhouses were down and feedlots were losing a bit as the cost to grain cattle for slaughter was high.

"The cow-calf guy has been the strongest for the last four years," said Maag, who has focused on the two family feedlots while other relatives have raised cattle. "Very seldom are all three (components of the industry) making money at the same time."

Ranchers running cow-calf pairs have done well recently because there have been fewer animals on the market, Malheur County Cattle-men's Association President Chris Christensen said.

Many ranchers reduced their herds in Texas after entering the third year of drought, he said.

"They liquidated whole herds and a lot of cows went to slaughter," Christensen said.

When the product became more scarce, the demand increased, which

was good news for cattle producers.

"These buyers were scrambling for the limited number of animals out there," Christensen said. "There were all-time record high beef prices."

Taking advantage of good times

In 2014, a calf right off a cow could bring in about \$1,500, he said. This year, there are more calves on the market, so the price likely won't be as good for sellers.

"It's reduced this year. Next year, it will be lower again," Christensen said.

So much is out of ranchers' control, from the weather to the White House. Deanne Vallad, who with her husband Jason has about 150 head of cattle outside Ontario, said producers have to learn to take advantage of the good times.

"When you have high highs, you'd better be getting your house in order so you can weather the low lows," she said.

Maag agreed. "When you're making money, you pay your debts, pay ahead a little bit. You plan ahead," he said. "These cy-

cles come and go. It's just the way it operates."

Water a lingering challenge

Vallad sees water as a lingering challenge for local ranchers.

"In the first 100 years of this valley, when people were homesteading, you saw water usage. Now, in the next 100 years, you're going to see a big trend toward water conservation," she said. "I tend to think it's going to change the scope of ag in Malheur County until such time as water is more abundant."

Christensen said the federal government is another wild card in the cattle business's future. The county "ducked a bullet" when the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service decided not to list greater sage grouse as an endangered species, but there are lingering land-use questions regarding the birds.

Maag said the ranchers need to have a bigger say in what happens to federal rangeland.

"Nobody knows better how to handle that range than the ranchers themselves," he said. "If they cheat on it, it's going to cheat on them."

Concern about monument listing

Christensen said ranchers also are concerned about the effect a wilderness or national monument listing in the Owyhee Canyonlands might have on the local industry.

Proponents of the protection efforts point out that grazing is allowed in wilderness and monument areas under federal law, but local producers worry such a designation might create a new baseline that would allow for grazing restrictions in the future.

"We're squarely against that. That's just unacceptable to tie up that much land in a park project," Christensen said of the 2.5 million-acre Owyhee Canyonlands proposal, a combination of national conservation area, wilderness, and wild and scenic river designations.

"That will devastate the southern part of county. That's a lot of acres," he added. "That ground down in there, there's a lot of big ranches, cattle and grazing down in there. There are huge implications in that."

Error: 'Each dispatch call cost us at least \$20'

Continued from Page 1A

'Big mistake'

Fritts said the error occurred because the agency's cost for operating expenses was added twice in budget spreadsheets.

"It was a big mistake," Fritts said.

Before Pacific County Communications discovered the error, local agencies were overcharged for their use of 911 services. All saw their bill for fiscal year 2015 jump — some by 50 percent.

According to the budget overview, Raymond Police Department paid more than \$120,000 for their 2015 dispatch services, an increase of nearly \$39,000. The same report stated Long Beach Police faced a hike of more than \$19,000 and South Bend police's bill jumped by \$37,000 compared to the year before.

Raymond Police Chief Dave Eastham said to reduce the expense, the department used secretarial staff for many of their calls in place of dispatch.

"It got to the point where each dispatch call cost us at least \$20," he said.

As a result of the error, Fritts said emergency agencies will see much smaller bills for dispatch services next year.

"A mistake like this doesn't just resolve itself, we will see it carry over into following budgets," Fritts said. She said she hadn't made an error like this in her 20 years experience, so she was in new territory.

Money discovered as tax increase proposed

Spoor said she discovered the error as the county was debating whether to ask voters if they supported a 911 tax increase to help fund dispatch services. Pacific Coun-

'It was unfortunately just a user error, and it was a big hit that no one caught.'

David Glasson

Pacific County communications administrator

ty Communications estimated the one-tenth of 1 percent sales tax would collect another \$250,000 for dispatch services annually.

Spoor said the county decided to move forward with the tax to create stable funding for the agency and reduce the cost that fell to local agencies.

"We didn't feel like (the error) was important to voters because the bigger issue is still an issue at hand," Spoor said, adding that she had said in public meetings Pacific County Communications' budget problems in 2015 stemmed from a number of issues.

"The cost for dispatch services is still increasing while state revenue is not," she said.

Fritts said she believed the accounting error and 911 tax increase were unrelated. She said the county has seen their budget costs increase and wanted a way to create a stable budget.

Fritts said the agency has been developing new policies to build a lasting fund balance. She said the first \$50,000 gained from the tax will go into a reserve fund for capital purchases.

After those funds are collected, Fritts said at least 10 percent of the money gained from the tax each year would go into the fund. She said administrative board would decide how to use the remaining money.

She suggested the dispatch's 20-year-old furniture be replaced.

"Dispatch is kind of a dismal place," Fritts said, adding that there was carpeting on the walls that created a

sound barrier. She said she is looking into vendor options.

Finding the error

Fritts built the spreadsheet used to create the budget from scratch. The 12-page document was sent out to the agency's administrative board and the Pacific County Sheriff's Office.

Pacific County Communications Administrator David Glasson, who is also the Long Beach city administrator, said it was a mistake missed by everyone.

"It's a document full of equations that a lot of people were contributing to," Glas-

son said. "It was unfortunately just a user error, and it was a big hit that no one caught."

County commissioners have a separate budget spreadsheet with fewer details that did not include the error, Spoor said.

The Astoria City Council wishes everyone a



JOYOUS HOLIDAY SEASON.

Enjoy the lights and Holiday festivities while shopping Downtown Astoria! Stores stay open late November 27th through December 18th.
www.astoriadowntown.com

Customers can park downtown longer than the posted time limit, except in metered spaces, November 27th through January 3rd.

2-HOUR SUPER SHOE SALE

Friday, Nov. 27 • 7-9am

25% OFF*

nearly everything

Gimre's Shoes

— ASTORIA —

Trust your feet to Gimre's Shoes.™

*Danner 10% off. Sorry no phone orders, layaways, coupons, gift certificates, corp. charges or other discounts. Excludes previous sales, phone orders & special orders. Limited to stock on hand.

ASTORIA: 239 14th St. • (503) 325-3972

WANTED

Alder and Maple Saw Logs & Standing Timber

Northwest Hardwoods • Longview, WA
Contact: Steve Axtell • 360-430-0885 or John Anderson • 360-269-2500

YOU ARE WANTED for a rootin' tootin' NIGHT OUT ON THE TOWN

Shine up yer fav'rite boots, grab yer Stetson, yer lady love and do-si-do on down to the Elk's Watering Hole for a good ol' fashioned hoe down

Astoria Elks Western Night
Saturday, November 28 | 6pm | \$12/person
459 11TH STREET | ASTORIA

GRUB: BBQ RIBS • GARLIC MASHERS
BAKED BEANS • SALAD & DESSERT

Costume Contest | Live Band | Raffles

Sheriff Perry & Deputy Doug will be keeping the peace by throwing the hoodlums in jail, so make sure you have bail money...just in case

Astoria Elks is now open 6 days a week
Monday, Tuesday, Thursday-Saturday at 4pm • Sunday 9am-4pm • Closed Wednesday

PACIFIC COAST MEDICAL SUPPLY

BLACK FRIDAY SALE

8:30-10:30am	10:30am-12:30pm
Value Lift Chair.....\$545.00	Value Lift Chair.....\$575.00
Traditional Lift Chair.....\$795.00	Traditional Lift Chair.....\$845.00
3-Wheeled Scooter.....\$749.00	3-Wheeled Scooter.....\$779.00
4-Wheeled Scooter.....\$799.00	4-Wheeled Scooter.....\$849.00
4-Wheeled Walker.....\$125.00	4-Wheeled Walker.....\$140.00
ALL OTHER ITEMS 20% OFF	
12:30-2:30pm	2:30-4:30pm
Value Lift Chair.....\$605.00	Value Lift Chair.....\$635.00
Traditional Lift Chair.....\$895.00	Traditional Lift Chair.....\$945.00
3-Wheeled Scooter.....\$809.00	3-Wheeled Scooter.....\$839.00
4-Wheeled Scooter.....\$899.00	4-Wheeled Scooter.....\$949.00
4-Wheeled Walker.....\$155.00	4-Wheeled Walker.....\$170.00
ALL OTHER ITEMS 10% OFF	
ALL OTHER ITEMS 15% OFF	
ALL OTHER ITEMS 5% OFF	

1062 MARINE DRIVE and 2158 EXCHANGE ST (STE 106) ASTORIA
Accredited by The Joint Commission We gladly bill insurance

503-338-0349
TOLL-FREE: 1-877-311-0349
HOURS: MON-FRI 8:30AM-5:00PM
CLOSED SATURDAYS • 24 HOURS ON CALL

SALES • RENTALS • DELIVERY
HOME MEDICAL
RESPIRATORY EQUIPMENT
HEALTH CARE PRODUCTS