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# Dairy/Livestock

## Ranchers like outlook for cattle prices

By CRAIG REED  
For the Capital Press



Craig Reed/For the Capital Press

Wily Wolfe vaccinates a calf during a branding day on the Wolfe Ranch near Dell, Mont., in late May. Wily Wolfe and her husband, Ed Wolfe, run a black Angus cow-calf operation in southwestern Montana.

DELL, Mont. — Ranchers might not be expecting the beef market to reach the highs of 2014, but they like what they see at this time in 2015.

"The market is in good shape," said Jim Hagenbarth, a co-owner of Hagenbarth Livestock that runs cattle in southwest Montana and southeast Idaho. "The market probably won't attain the levels that it did last year when it was exceptional, but things are looking very good."

Ed Wolfe, another southwest Montana rancher, said he's looking forward to the market being "favorable."

"I don't look for it to go up much, I don't look for it to go down much," said Wolfe, who has been in the ranching business for over 50 years. "Ranching has been fairly steady."

Bill Hoyt, a past Oregon Cattlemen's Association president, said while beef prices in June weren't quite as high as a year ago, they were substan-

tially better than in the years prior to 2014. Hoyt runs cattle in both Douglas and Lane counties in western Oregon.

Stacy Davies, the general manager of the Roaring Springs Ranch in southeastern Oregon, was also optimistic about the market.

"These are very profitable times for the cow-calf and

yearling sectors," said Davies, who has cattle in both Oregon and near Sterling, Colo.

The ranchers explained prices are staying up because despite the national cow herd slightly edging up to 89.9 million as of Jan. 1, 2015, according to the National Cattlemen's Beef Association, that number is still the lowest

since the early 1950s. Subsequently, the domestic beef supply is at an all-time low while consumer demand for the protein product remains strong.

According to the USDA National Agricultural Statistical Service, Oregon had 1.3 million cattle as of Jan. 1, slightly up from the

1.28 million a year earlier, Idaho had 2.3 million as of Jan. 1, up from 2.24 million a year before, and Washington had 1.15 million, up from 1.11 million. California, with 5.15 million cattle as of Jan. 1, and Montana with 2.5 million saw slight declines in their herd totals compared to the prior year.

To the east in the Great Plains states of Texas, Oklahoma and Kansas a prolonged drought prior to last fall resulted in herd shrinkage. Rain during the past year has now given those states the most potential for herd expansion.

Rains that fell in May in many U.S. western regions were a blessing, according to the ranchers. Davies said the average rainfall in Sterling, Colo., is 16 inches and that area received that many inches in May alone. He said the grass on Colorado's east side "is so good."

"They have more grass than ever before," he said.

On Roaring Springs' home ranch in Oregon, 3 inches of rain fell in May. Idaho and

Montana ranches also received those May rains.

"It looked disastrous around the first of May, then both Montana and Idaho got some tremendous rains," Hagenbarth said of the water that quickly helped pastures and hay fields grow. The rancher added that he expected good pasture to be at a premium during the forecasted hot and dry summer.

There was little to no snowpack so the May rain was much needed.

While pasture sprouted with the May rains, many Northwest ranchers figure irrigation water will be in short supply in many areas. If so, they know second and third cuttings of hay will be jeopardized. There could be a short supply of hay and a high demand, pushing the price up. As always, rain showers through the summer and fall to green up pastures would ease the demand for hay.

"You're always concerned about hay costs," Hoyt said. "It just depends on what the weather does."

## Drought happens: Proper planning, management helps ranchers

By DOUG WARNOCK  
For the Capital Press

**Greener Pastures**  
Doug Warnock



Agricultural producers in the Pacific Northwest are used to encountering a drought every few years and, occasionally, several years in a row. How producers deal with drought, reducing its impact, differs with the individual.

A person's approach will depend on the crop or product, where they are located and many other factors. Experienced graziers have developed their own ways to handle drought, but the less experienced will be looking for wisdom from their peers.

Most of the irrigated pastures must get by with less

water this year due to much smaller snowpacks. Rangeland managers are dealing with both heat-stressed forage plants and smaller supplies of livestock drinking water.

Drought can be a one-two punch in that it not only reduces the current year's plant growth, but also can result in lower production the following year. The way the forage plants are managed during a drought can affect the plants' ability to thrive in subse-

quent years. Moisture stressed plants will not recover from grazing as well or as rapidly as a healthy plant. That is why it is critical to keep plant tissue removal at more moderate levels and protect the plant's crown. The crown is the plant's source of reserves for recovery.

To avoid overuse and reduce plant stress, it may be necessary to reduce the number of animals grazing the pasture. Often producers will reduce their herd or flock size to reduce grazing pressure. It is very important going into a grazing season to reduce animal numbers as soon as one is aware of potential drought. Reductions made early can

help the operator get through the drought without too many other changes. Some producers seek alternative feeds to replace reduced forage availability. These feeds are usually more abundant in irrigated cropping areas, but these may be less available due to shortened irrigation seasons.

By-products and crop residues may be a source of feed to help get livestock through times of shorter grazing periods. Ruminants can make use of products from grass seed production, such as grass straw and pelleted residues, cereal straw, corn stalks, peavine hay and others. Grass hay, oat hay and off-quality alfalfa are also useful when

fed properly. They are normally available at lower prices than higher-quality hay.

When feeding any type of hay or plant residue, it is important to have the feed tested to determine its quality and nutrient content. The testing can be done at any forage-testing laboratory for a nominal fee. The information provided allows the operator to know what and how much supplementation is needed to provide a proper diet for the animals.

Proper planning and management allows an operator to better prepare for droughts. In fact, the wise manager will develop a grazing plan at the beginning of each year

with three different scenarios: What will I do in case of a wetter than normal year, a normal year and a drier than normal year? Once the moisture situation is known, the appropriate plan can be implemented.

A well-developed grazing plan helps the manager be better prepared to deal with drought and other management challenges.

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## Cash dairy prices mixed in active trading

By LEE MIELKE  
For the Capital Press

**Dairy Markets**  
Lee Mielke



CME cash cheese and nonfat dry milk prices headed south last week as cheese in particular was making its way to Chicago. Butter moved higher but things are changing this week.

The Cheddar blocks closed the 4th of July holiday shortened week at \$1.62 per pound, down 2 cents on the week and 34 3/4-cents short of last year's level. They were unchanged Monday but jumped 2 1/4-cents Tuesday, to \$1.6425 per pound.

Cheddar barrels closed Thursday at \$1.5825, down 4 1/4-cents on the week and 40 1/4-cents below a year ago. They lost three-quarters of a cent Monday but were unchanged Tuesday, holding at

\$1.5750, a higher than normal 6 3/4-cents below the blocks. Eleven cars of block traded hands last week and 29 of barrel, the seventh consecutive week that barrel traded was at double-digit levels.

Dairy Market News reports that "strong cheese sales have been normal in the Midwest for some time and that is contributing to some manufacturers playing more hardball in price negotiations. DMN adds that "profitability is looking good this year for Midwest cheese manufacturers as the halfway point of the year is reached.

The overwhelming majority of comments looking forward a few months are confident about selling however much cheese a plant can make. Some plants are reporting that components are beginning to decline, not in any alarming way, from recent weeks, as is seasonally normal. In much of the region the weather has been excellent for cows."

This has also led to a good crop year, with second cutting of hay alfalfa completed in much of Wisconsin. Corn in some areas was nearly shoulder high by the Fourth of July. These factors are working together, in the opinion of cheesemakers, to contribute to expected good milk production over the next few months, according to DMN.

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