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Heat, drought take toll on Western milk production

By CAROL RYAN DUMAS
Capital Press

Lower milk production in the West due to triple-digit temperatures and a expanding drought is putting a dent in national production figures even as dairy farmers east of the Continental Divide post healthy year-over-year increases.

June milk production in the 23 major dairy states, at 16.4 billion pounds, slowed to 0.7 percent above year-ago levels, following a 1.7 percent average increase from January through May, according to USDA National Agricultural Statistic Service.

Production in California was down 4.3 percent in June compared with June of last year. Milk production was down 153 million pounds on 1,000 fewer cows and a deficit of 85 pounds per cow.

A lot of it has to do with the quality of available feed, said Tom Barcellos, a Porterville, Calif., producer and an executive director of Western United Dairymen.

Don Jenkins/Capital Press

Dairy cows graze in a pasture as sprinklers run in the background near Sequim, Wash., on June 1. Milk production in the West has fallen because of the hot weather and drought.

The drought and a lack of water has his operation redirecting what little water it has from alfalfa and corn to other forages, such as sorghum. Some other producers might be making adjustments to rations based on current milk prices, and some might be focused on low-cost inputs, he said.

Warm weather coupled with intermittent drizzles has also resulted in higher humidity that "just knocks it out of cows," he said.

Idaho slowed production from a 2.8 percent increase in May to only 1 percent in June. Milk production was up 12 million pounds on an additional 9,000 cows but with a loss of 10 pounds per cow.

Some of the downturn is probably forage quality, but last summer's high temperatures stressed cows across the state, affecting this year's calving cycle, said Tony VanderHulst, a Wendell, Idaho, dairy farmer and president of the Idaho Dairymen's Association.

His gut — and a lot of dry cows — tells him lower production is due to the long delay in cows breeding back last summer, he said.

It took cows four months to recuperate from the heat last July and August. They didn't start settling down and getting pregnant until November and December, and milk starts tailing off at five months pregnant, he said.

"We really didn't have a spring flush," he added.

His operation has a fuller-than-usual dry pen for this time of year, and June's triple-digit temperatures didn't help production, he said.

This summer's heat also took a toll in Washington state. June production dropped only slightly, 0.4 percent, but the loss of 2 million pounds was on an additional 2,000 cows and a deficit of 20 pounds per cow.

"Extreme temperatures took a lot of loads out of the Yakima Valley … dried up a lot of milk," said Sunnyside, Wash., producer Tony Veiga, president of Washington State Dairy Federation.

And the drought and heat are certainly affecting the quality of feed being grown, he said.

The hot summer is also affecting feed crops in Oregon, limiting forage crops to two cuttings instead of three or four, said Tami Kerr, executive director of Oregon Dairy Farmers Association.

But it also affects cow comfort, with cows eating less and producing less milk, she said.

Oregon's June milk production dropped 3.2 percent, down 7 million pounds on 2,000 fewer cows and a loss of 30 pounds per cow.

Lower production from other big producers also helped rein in U.S. milk production. Texas was down 2.1 percent, and New Mexico was down 4.5 percent.

USDA grants milk marketing order hearing

By CAROL RYAN DUMAS
Capital Press

USDA has granted California dairymen a hearing to consider the establishment of a federal milk marketing order for the state. The announcement came Wednesday.

The public hearing will begin on Sept. 22 in Clovis and is expected to last several weeks. USDA will hear testimony and receive evidence regarding four proposals for a FMMO in California.

"We're really excited and commend USDA for granting a hearing," said Lynn McBride, executive director of California Dairy Campaign.

CDC has long called for California to join the federal order system and supports the proposal put forth by the state's three major dairy co-ops, she said.

In February, California Dairies, Inc., Land O Lakes and Dairy Farmers of America requested a formal hearing and submitted a proposal. Additional proposals were submitted by Dairy Institute of California, California Producer Handlers Association and Ponderosa Dairy.

McBride said a federal order is needed to bring California's milk prices and the process for determining prices into alignment with the rest of the country.

She said the hearing notice "could not have come at a better time for producers, with income so far below cost of production."

California's blend price for milk is about $15 per hundredweight while the cost of production is in the $19 range. And there's a lot of uncertainty about the rest of the year given the situation in New Zealand, she said.

Dairy product prices on the Global Dairy Trade auction have fallen to 13-year lows, and dairy farmers in New Zealand — where the majority of dairy production is exported — are struggling, according to industry reports.

The push for a federal order resulted from years of frustration over the sizeable difference between California's 4b price for milk going to cheese and its Class III counterpart in federal orders. The discrepancy lies in the value of whey in the milk formula. Producers have tried for years to get the state's Ag Department to remedy the problem.

USDA seeks to maximize dairy producer participation in the hearing process and producers will have the final vote on whether to approve a federal order proposal, McBride said.

"It's their decision," she added.

USDA's hearing will begin at 9 a.m. on Sept. 22 at the Clovis Veterans Memorial District Building, 808 Fourth St., Clovis.

All of the proposals can be viewed at www.ams.usda.gov/CAOrder.

Those interested in testifying should notify USDA upon arrival at the hearing.

For additional information, visit www.ams.usda.gov/CAOrder or contact William Francis, director, order formulation and enforcement at (202) 720-6274; or by email at william.francis@ams.usda.gov.

Retired rancher creates rock with images of 105 cattle brands

By SEAN ELLIS
Capital Press

FAIRFIELD, Idaho — The symbols of 105 cattle brands, some dating back well over 100 years, have been hand-carved into a 600-pound sandstone rock in this Camas County city.

Some of the brands are no longer recorded and would have otherwise been lost to history.

The brand rock was created by 78-year-old retired rancher Mel Fletcher, who said he wanted to record a little bit of the state's cattle industry history.

"It was just a way to preserve history," he said. "I want people to have a connection with their past."

The rock, which is in front of the Camas County Senior and Community Center, has attracted the attention of a lot of people formerly or currently involved with the state's cattle industry, rancher Tim Moore said.

"Word's getting around about it," he said. "Everybody comes here and looks for their brand. It's a tribute to all the old ranches, some of them still going, some of them not."

As word about the rock has spread, more people have asked to have their family's brand added and Fletcher said the rock has room for about two more brands.

"We might have to find him another rock," Moore said.

Fletcher was inspired to create the brand rock after discovering a rock in a remote and hard-to-reach area between Fairfield and Gooding that contains images of a lot of old cattle brands.

The area can only be reached by all-terrain vehicle and locals have organized a few caravans to visit it.

"Nobody knows who did it or when it was done; somewhere around 1915 is my guess," said Fletcher, who created his own rock to preserve some of Southern Idaho's old brands before they, too, were lost to history.

Some of the brands on Fletcher's rock are not recorded and date back a long time, said Hugh Koomce, a retired rancher from this area, which serves as summer range for many cattle operations.

Sean Ellis/Capital Press

Retired rancher Mel Fletcher stands in front of a brand rock he created that contains the symbols of 105 Idaho cattle brands. The sandstone rock is located at the Camas County Senior and Community Center in Fairfield.

"There are brands on there that are well over 100 years old," he said.

Idaho State Brand Inspector Larry Hayhurst said about 35 percent of Idaho's recorded brands are not used but serve as family heirlooms. He fields a lot of calls from people who want him to look up their family's old brand.

He said some restaurants have cattle brands on their walls but he's never heard of a brand rock like the one Fletcher created.

"That's a great idea," he said. "People cherish those brands."

Beulah Baldwin, who was involved in the cattle business for many years, helped research the brands that appear on Fletcher's rock. A lot of the brands were taken from an old cattle rustling reward poster she found.

Baldwin will help Fletcher create a legend that will provide a little history behind each of the brands.

The brands will be numbered and the corresponding history behind them will be available in the senior center.

The National Dairy Producers Organization, Inc.
The Producer's Voice

Deflategate for Dairy Farmers (USDA Projections)

	2015	2016
Class 3 and 4 milk price combined (CWT)	$15.40	$16.30
2014 class 3 and 4 combined (CWT)	22.72	22.72
Projected price deflation (CWT)	$ 7.32	6.42

Hold those accountable who manage over 80% of U.S. milk production with 31 dairy co-op members and dozens of milk buying customer members. Call National Milk Producers Federation at 703-243-6111 or your local NMPF representative from the list below:

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It is time for a business plan that achieves the sustainable profitability for dairy farmers. The National Dairy Producers Organization has such a plan.

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Bulls battle bears on dairy markets

By LEE MIELKE
For the Capital Press

Dairy Markets

Lee Mielke

Dairy prices saw ups and downs the last week of July as the market awaits clear direction.

Cheese added to last Friday's losses, then reversed direction Wednesday and shot higher for the second week in a row. Block Cheddar closed the last Friday of July at $1.7475 per pound, up a nickel on the week but 25 1/4-cents below a year ago. It lost a penny Monday, as traders anticipated Tuesday's Global Dairy Trade auction and the June Dairy Products report, and took them down another 1 3/4-cents Tuesday to $1.72 per pound.

Cheddar barrels finished Friday at $1.6975, up 3 3/4-cents for the week and 30 1/4-cents below a year ago. They were down three-quarters Monday and inched back up a quarter-cent Tuesday, to $1.6925.

Only one car of block was sold last week at the CME and seven of barrel. Eleven cars of barrel and three of block had already traded hands as of Tuesday this week.

FC Stone dairy broker Dave Kurzawski wrote in his Monday Early Morning Update, "The trade is clearly on edge as indicated by moves exacerbated by light volumes being traded. On one hand, the bearishness which has clawed away at the market for the better part of 2015 remains present from both a global scale and a domestic perspective. On the other hand, the last milk production report, which came in lower than expected, at 0.7 percent higher than year ago levels, and likely served as a warning shot across the bow. It's not that the report was a game changer in itself, but subsequent reports reflecting a decrease in Midwestern production and a further drop off in California and other Western states could start to shift the temperament and psychology of the trade."

Dairy Market News reports that, while most cheese plants are receiving the milk volumes they want, contracted volumes and components are declining in most locations. Surplus milk is getting tighter and less price favorable. Some manufacturers are hesitating to agree to sell additional cheese to regular contract customers through the later part of 2015 because they are not certain they can obtain enough milk to deliver the cheese.

Spot butter closed Friday at $1.99 per pound, up 3 1/2-cents on the week but 41 cents below a year ago when it plunged 19 cents, to $2.40. It was unchanged Monday and Tuesday. Thirteen cars traded hands last week at the CME.

World-class calf roping event to benefit Beef Counts

By CAROL RYAN DUMAS
Capital Press

JEROME, Idaho — The 4th Annual Caring Cowboys Beef Counts Open Calf Roping will take place Aug. 16 at the Jerome County Fairgrounds.

Sunday's action begins at 9 a.m. with a junior calf roping with the Pacific Northwest's most talented young tie-down ropers. The Caring Cowboys Beef Counts Open Calf Roping will follow.

In its fourth year, this event aims to bring over 40 top professional calf ropers, including Jake Hannum, Shane Hanchey, Ryan Jarrett, and Tyson Durfey, in one arena for an afternoon of world class calf roping to benefit Beef Counts, Idaho's Beef Industry United Against Hunger.

Live and silent auctions, including a cowboy auction, will begin at 3 p.m. followed by the open roping at 4 p.m. Concessions will be available on-site.