

# Trout sales lag pre-pandemic levels

By CAROL RYAN DUMAS  
Capital Press



Carol Ryan Dumas/Capital Press File

Sales of trout produced in the U.S., at \$97.3 million in 2021, were up 1% from the previous year, when the pandemic sparked a 13% drop.

Sales in 2021 were still down 11% from 2019's pre-pandemic levels.

The vast majority of the sales are food-size fish, 12 inches and longer, which accounted for \$89.9 million in sales in 2021, according to USDA National Agricultural Statistics Service.

Those sales were up 2% from low comparables in 2020, when the pandemic hit. Sales of food-size trout dropped 12% year over year in 2020, despite a 2% increase in price. And those sales in 2021 were still down 9% from 2019.

"During the pandemic, people stopped going out to restaurants," said Linda Lemmon, a fish producer and executive secretary of the Idaho Aquaculture Association.

That's where a lot of those fish are sold. Some restaurants switched to drive-thru and takeout, but those offerings didn't necessarily include fish, she said.

"When there was a lockdown, people didn't go out and sales dropped off," she said.

Nationwide, the number

## Trout sales are down from pre-pandemic levels, the NASS reports.

of pounds of food-size trout sold in 2021 totaled 44.8 million, up 0.7% from the previous year but down 12% from 2019.

Pandemic-related declines in Idaho — which produces about 68% of U.S. food-size trout — were probably higher than the national numbers, said Gary Fornshell, retired University of Idaho Extension educator for aquaculture.

Almost all of Idaho's trout is sold for food, while other states sell a lot to recreation-based markets. He heard some Idaho producers lost up to 50% of their market, he said.

"The primary constraint was the loss of markets and having to make the transition from foodservice to retail," he said.

USDA didn't publish numbers on pounds sold of Idaho trout for 2020, but that number was 21.7 million in 2021.

Prior to the pandemic, from 1991 to 2019, Idaho's average pounds sold were over 39 million, he said.

The lost sales in 2020 interrupted trout producers' production cycles, Lemmon said.

It takes 10 months to a year to grow out fish, and producers stopped hatching out eggs

because they couldn't afford to feed the fish, she said.

"The industry is still in turmoil trying to recover; some people will go out of business," she said.

Pandemic assistance helped, but that only goes so far, she said.

"Look at how many restaurants went out of business. You can only put so much in the freezer and keep it for so long," she said.

The pandemic has really hit the people who raise and process fish hard, she said.

One positive in the report is a substantial increase in eggs sales in 2021, Fornshell said.

At 501.3 million, egg sales were up nearly 42% from 2020, according to USDA.

Sales of trout 6-12 inches totaled \$6.16 million, down 8% from the previous year and down 17.2% from 2019. The number of trout 6-12 inches totaled 4.89 million, down 28% from 2021 and down 46.3% from 2019.

Sales of trout 1-6 inches totaled \$1.21 million in 2021, up 20% year over year but down 1.4% from 2019. The number of trout 1-6 inches sold totaled 5.03 million, up 5% year over year but down 12% from 2019.

# Updated Senate bill retains mandatory cash cattle trade

By CAROL RYAN DUMAS  
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Cattle producers have become increasingly vocal about the lack of robust price discovery in the fed cattle market and their ability to receive a fair price for their cattle.

They point to the declining number of participants in the competitive cash market, which establishes the "going rate" for cattle based on market conditions and is used as a base rate in alternative marketing arrangements.

Participation in that market has dwindled over the years as buyers moved to formula pricing, forward contracts and longer-term marketing agreements.

Cattle producers have called for increased participation in the negotiated cash market and access to the details of alternative marketing agreements. But they have also disagreed on the extent to which government should be involved.

On Monday, Sens. Chuck Grassley, R-Iowa; Jon Tester, D-Mont.; Deb Fischer, R-Neb.; and Ron Wyden, D-Ore., released an updated version of a bill they introduced in November to accomplish those goals.

Among other things, the Cattle Price Discovery and Transparency Act of 2022 would establish approved pricing mechanisms, mandate regional minimum cash purchases and establish a publicly available cattle contract library of alternative marketing arrangements.

The bill is getting mixed reviews from cattle producers and beef processors.

National Farmers Union is in full support.

U.S. Cattlemen's Association is hopeful it will establish a fair cattle market but is reviewing the bill.

The American Farm Bureau Federation and National Cattlemen's Beef Association support a cattle contract library but oppose mandatory cash sales.

R-CALF USA has concerns about the lack of immediate and substantive requirements for minimum cash trade, and the North America Meat Institute strongly opposes the bill.

Rob Larew, NFU president, said the bill would shed light on the market and bring about greater fairness.

"Fair and competitive markets rely on price discovery and transparency. For farmers and ranchers to bargain effectively with packers, they need access to reliable, accurate pricing information," he said.

Brooke Miller, U.S. Cattlemen's Association president, said the industry needs to restore marketplace fundamentals and implement guardrails to prevent the industry from capsizing.

"USCA stands with county, state and national producer associations across the U.S. in supporting mandatory cash trade minimums ...," he said.

Ethan Lane, vice president of government affairs for National Cattlemen's Beef Association, said that despite overwhelming feedback in opposition to a cash mandate, the bill would subject cattle producers to a business-altering government edict.

"This is an indication of just how far the sponsors of this bill have strayed from the wishes of the majority of cattle producers around the country," he said.

"It is time for the sponsors to finally consider the perspectives of all those who this bill would impact, not just those in their own backyards — and we are ready to have that conversation whenever they are," he said.

Bill Bullard, R-CALF CEO, said his organization remains concerned that USDA would have two years to set minimum cash trade levels and that it would set and keep them at inappropriate levels.

"We were hoping Congress would provide a measured response to this serious crisis, and we will continue wading through this complicated proposal to determine if it provides any meaningful reform worthy of America's independent cattle producers' support," he said.

Julie Anna Potts, Meat Institute president, said the bill calls for radical government interference and convoluted mandates.

"If this bill becomes law, there will be cattle producers who want alternative marketing arrangements but will instead be forced to sell on the cash market, and the industry will turn back time to the days of commodity cattle, or worse, to government-controlled markets," she said.

Farm Bureau did not immediately respond to Capital Press' request for comment, but issued a statement in January on the previous bill introduced in November.

"We support the majority of this legislation, but we cannot support mandatory cash sales," Zippy Duvall, Farm Bureau president, said at the time.

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