

# Drought forces cattle producers to thin herd

By CAROL RYAN DUMAS  
Capital Press

Widespread and expanding drought in the U.S. is sending more cattle than usual to feedlots and slaughter.

Unfortunately, there doesn't appear to be a lot of reason for optimism, said Derrell Peel, extension livestock specialist with Oklahoma State University.

The latest U.S. Seasonal Drought Outlook for the next three months suggests continued drought in drought regions and possibly more drought developing in the Midwest and a little in the Gulf states, he said during the latest "Farm Country Update" webinar.

The U.S. is going to continue to be in a La Nina pat-



S. John Collins/Baker City Herald File

Analysts say widespread drought is sending more cattle than expected into feedlots and on to slaughter.

tern at least into the beginning of next year, so things

don't look favorable, he said. "We have a lot of poor

forage conditions in terms of pasture. We have limited hay stocks and limited hay production going on this year, so really a lot of challenges across the board," he said.

As a result, hay prices are record high and feed grain and supplemental feed prices are high as well. There's just no relief in sight in any direction, he said.

The July 1 beef cow herd was down 2.4% year over year, and it is down 6.3% since the recent peak in 2018, and he expects it will be down at least another million head this calendar year.

The calf crop also peaked in 2018, and feeder supplies outside feedlots are tighten-

ing up, down 2.7% on July 1. Feedlots haven't seen all of the impact of that yet, in part because the drought is sending cattle to feedlots early, he said.

"Feedlots have kind of been defying gravity by holding these feedlot inventories high. But I don't think they can continue to do that from this point forward," he said.

Placements into feedlots in June were down 2.4%, and all of that decline was in the heavier weight categories. Placements of cattle 700 pounds and less was up almost 4%, he said.

"We're holding these feedlot inventories in part

by borrowing against future feeder cattle supplies," he said.

There's been some early weaning and movement out of the country and into feedlots as forage supplies are depleted.

The number of steers in feedlots are down, and the number of heifers in feedlots is up. There have been more heifers in feedlots all year and that's going to continue. The other side of that is beef replacement heifers were down 3.5% on July 1, he said.

"We're going to have a very limited amount of heifer calves and bred heifers as we go into next year," he said.

Heifer slaughter is up 3.9% year to date, and beef cow slaughter is up 14% he said.

"We're slaughtering females and, again, that has implications not only for this year but for the next several years," he said.

The drought is taking the industry to lower cattle numbers than intended. He thinks sometime in the next four years, the scenario will probably be pretty similar to what happened in the 2013 to 2016 timeframe, he said.

"Once we move past the drought at some point in time, we're going to have tremendous incentives to rebuild this industry," he said.

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## Idaho Wheat Commission chooses new executive director

By MATTHEW WEAVER  
Capital Press



**Britany Hurst Marchant**

Britany Hurst Marchant says growers can look for a smooth transition as she takes over leadership of the Idaho Wheat Commission.

Marchant will become commission's executive director Sept. 1. She replaces Casey Chumrau,

who joined the commission in 2020 and is leaving to become CEO of the Washington Grain Commission.

Marchant said she's had

good mentors and examples of leadership while working for the Idaho Commission, particularly Chumrau, who encouraged her to apply for the job.

"Working with and being mentored by Casey and the commissioners will facilitate continuity and an easy transition," Marchant told the Capital Press. "Hopefully growers can expect the same quality leadership they're used to, although Casey leaves big shoes to fill."

Marchant joined the commission as communications and grower education manager in December 2017. She previously worked as communications director, lobbyist and environmental policy director for the Idaho Cattle Association.

The commission's general priorities are to get Idaho wheat into domestic and international markets, Marchant said. Half of Idaho's wheat crop is exported.

"Making sure those markets stay open, so (growers') family farms are profitable and sustainable into the future," she said.

Marchant grew up in the Mini-Cassia, "rural, agricultural" area of south-central Idaho. She attended Boise State University, where she earned a bachelor's degree in history and political science.

She wanted to be a lobbyist and work on the policy side of the industry, she said.

She is "working on behalf of the people who put food on our tables, and the tables around the world," she said. "Farm families are the backbone of Western culture and Idaho's economy, and it's very important to me."

"While we had a pool of excellent candidates to choose from, Britany was the obvious choice for the position," commission chairman Clark Hamilton said in a press release. "She brings a wealth of knowledge to the table with her previous work with the commission. Her passion for agriculture in Idaho, knowledge of the wheat industry, and her professional experience and connections made her the right choice for the job. We look forward to the future and great things to come with Britany at the helm."

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