

# Cattle numbers fall sharply in U.S.

By CAROL RYAN DUMAS  
Capital Press

SALEM — The number of beef and dairy cattle and calves in the U.S. on Jan. 1 declined about 1.9 million head year over year to 91.9 million.

“As expected, cattle numbers are down pretty much in every category,” said Derrell Peel, extension livestock marketing specialist with Oklahoma State University.

“We expected tighter numbers, and they were every bit of that and more,” he said.

Some categories are down even more than expected. The beef cow herd is down 2.3%, and beef replacement heifers are down 3.3%, Peel said.

That leaves limited prospects for herd rebuilding, he said.

“I think producers would like to keep heifers, they just can’t,” he said.

Drought impacted heifer retention last year, and “we don’t know what this year is going to hold for us,” he added.

Impacts were expected in drought-stricken states, and the biggest

## January 1 U.S. cattle inventory

Class	2021 (1,000 head)	2022	percent change
All cattle and calves*	93,789.5	91,901.6	-2.0
Beef cows, heifers that have calved	30,843.6	30,125.1	-2.3
Replacement beef heifers	5,803.1	5,611.5	-3.3
Replacement heifers expected to calve	3,509.6	3,411.5	-2.8
All cattle on feed	14,667.4	14,692.6	0.2
Calf crop	35,495.5	35,085.4	-1.2

Source: USDA-NASS \*beef and dairy

decrease in beef cows — in percentage decline and absolute numbers — was in South Dakota, Peel said.

Cow numbers there declined 11% and 189,000 head. Montana’s beef cow numbers were down significantly, as expected, about 6% and 90,000 head, he said.

Texas also had a pretty big decline — down 3% and 160,000 head — but not all of it was due to drought, Peel said.

Colorado’s beef cows were down another 3% after having liquidated a lot last year, and Nebraska’s cow herd

declined 3%. Declines were also seen in the Southwest.

Beef cow slaughter was up 9% year over year in 2021 largely because of the drought, he said.

“That clearly indicates liquidation,” he said.

That level of cow slaughter represents 11.55% of the beef cow herd, Peel said.

“I would expect that to be under 11% if we weren’t liquidating,” he said.

Drought is going to play a critical role, and cows will have to be liqui-

dated at an even bigger number than last year, he said.

The Jan. 1 cattle on feed inventory was up just 0.2%, the 2021 calf crop was down 1.2% and the estimated feeder cattle supply is down 2.6%.

“We’ve reached a point now where there’s just not enough feeders in the pipeline” to keep feedlots full, Peel said.

Feedlot numbers should go down noticeably in the next two to four months, he said.

The tighter cattle numbers are bullish for prices, he said.

“It’s going to help support prices because the numbers are even smaller than expected. We already expected higher prices, so it’s certainly going to support that,” Peel said.

Feed cattle prices broke loose late last year, rising substantially. There won’t be enough cattle to keep feedlots full, and there won’t be the bottlenecks in processing, he said.

That’s all favorable for cattle prices, but feed costs are going to be a factor for feedlots and cow-calf producers. Cow-calf producers are also going to be dealing with drought, he said.

# Guard is suspected in prison drug probe

By PHIL WRIGHT  
East Oregonian

PENDLETON — An officer at Eastern Oregon Correctional Institution, Pendleton, is under investigation for supplying drugs to inmates.

Jesse Myer, Milton-Freewater police officer and a detective with the Blue Mountain Enforcement Narcotics Team, or BENT, filed a search warrant affidavit Jan. 28 in Umatilla County Circuit Court explaining what set off the investigation.

EOCI in late 2021 and early 2022 saw an increase in the number of adults in custody who tested positive for drugs, specifically methamphetamine and marijuana, according to the affidavit. The medium-security prison from June to November had 20 inmates test positive for various narcotics. But in December, seven men in custody tested positive, and five were for marijuana. In January, the number jumped to 25 inmates who tested positive, most for meth and marijuana.

The prison had shut down visitation with inmates on Jan. 4 due to coronavirus restrictions, according to the affidavit, leaving EOCI staff as the only way for drugs to get inside.

One adult in custody, according to Myer’s affidavit, provided information that one corrections officer was supplying meth and marijuana products. Then a second inmate came forward and named the same officer. In early January, a third inmate also named the same officer as the drug supplier, saying he saw the officer exchange “balloons” containing meth, cocaine and marijuana with inmates.

A review of surveillance video, the affidavit stated, confirmed the transaction with the inmates.

The East Oregonian is not identifying the officer at this time because the investigation is ongoing and there have been no arrests.

# When permanent is not permanent

New status of OHA school mask rule is not what it may seem to be

By DICK MASON  
The Observer

LA GRANDE — The Oregon Health Authority’s adoption of permanent rules last month requiring masks to be worn in schools is creating confusion and causing some people to be unduly worried.

Mark Mulvihill, superintendent of the InterMountain Education Service District, whose service area includes Union County, said some people mistakenly assume that the adoption of the permanent rules means students will be required to continue wearing masks after the pandemic is over. Mulvihill said this will be far from the case. OHA intends to rescind the mandate, he said, once the pandemic is over. Mulvihill said the word “permanent” in this case is misleading.

“It is a question of semantics,” he said.



Mendoza



Mulvihill

North Powder School District Superintendent Lance Dixon agrees the word adds an element of confusion.

“It is not really permanent. It is only permanent until they repeal it,” he said.

The state adopted permanent rules on Friday, Jan. 28, requiring masks in school settings, replacing a temporary rule that was set to expire.

Oregon health and education officials have required masks all school year as one mitigation strategy aimed at limiting the spread of COVID-19, so that students can stay in school full time.

And while recent policies around contact tracing and COVID-19 exposures have changed, masks will remain required in school settings until the rules are repealed.

As for when that might be, Oregon

education officials say it depends on the course of COVID-19.

“The virus sets the timeline,” wrote the Oregon Department of Education’s Ready Schools, Safe Learners resilience manager Kati Moseley in a message to superintendents and school leaders on Jan. 28.

“OHA can rescind the masking requirements if it believes the rule or parts of the rule are no longer necessary to control COVID-19,” wrote OHA officials in response to concerns about what might trigger the repeal of the rules.

Meanwhile, Mulvihill is encouraging people to remain calm.

“Do not overreact,” he said. “By no means will students still be wearing masks when the pandemic is over. Children will not be wearing masks during cold season three years from now.”

Mulvihill said Gov. Kate Brown’s executive order calling for the masking mandate, which went into effect before the school year started, has a sunset date and cannot be renewed. He said the OHA had only two options,

to let the executive order expire or to give its rule permanent status. The mask mandate was set to expire Feb. 8.

La Grande School District Superintendent George Mendoza said factors that could lead to the mask mandate being rescinded will involve not only falling infection rates but also stronger systems of support for COVID-19 issues and improving health care systems for the virus.

OHA officials have said COVID-19 hospitalizations and deaths, transmission data, vaccination rates and guidance from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention will all play a role in decision-making when it comes to mask requirements.

Dixon believes that as the COVID-19 front improves, the pressure to let school districts decide on mask mandates will increase.

“At some point they are going to be getting a lot of pressure to return to local control,” he said.

*Oregon Public Broadcasting reporter Elizabeth Miller contributed to this report.*

# Protection for your pride and joy



**Jeanette M Radinovich, Agent**  
101 W Main Street  
John Day, OR 97845  
Bus: 541-575-2073

For the family you’d do anything for, life insurance could mean everything. I can help you find easy, affordable ways to protect their future. Call me today.

Like a good neighbor, State Farm is there.®

State Farm Life Insurance Company (Not licensed in MA, NY or WI)  
State Farm Life and Accident Assurance Company (Licensed in NY and WI)  
Bloomington, IL

2001573

**State Farm**®