

COW/CALF CORNER

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North American cattle situation: Canada

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The North American cattle and beef market is a complex set of cattle and beef flows among Canada, Mexico and the U.S. These trade flows played a role in the unprecedented production and prices that occurred in 2014 and will play a role in 2015 and beyond. Trade impacts among the NAFTA countries were generally as expected in 2014. Beef imports from Canada increased while beef exports to Canada decreased compared to 2013. Cattle imports from Canada and Mexico also increased year over year along with beef imports from Mexico. Canada and Mexico accounted for a combined 31.1 percent of U.S. beef exports and 30.9 percent of U.S. beef imports in 2014. The impact of Canada and Mexico on the U.S. cattle and beef market may be different in 2015. More detail on the Canadian situation follows.

U.S. imports of Canadian beef increased 11.9 percent in 2014 compared to one year earlier. Canadian cattle slaughter and beef production increased year over year in 2014 as cattle inventories continued to decline. However, cattle slaughter and beef production are expected to decline in 2015. Canadian beef exports are expected to close to 2014 levels in 2015 due to tight supplies. Nevertheless, U.S. imports of Canadian beef are up nearly 14 percent in the first two months of 2015. U.S. beef exports to Canada have continued to fall in 2015 with January and February combined beef exports to Canada down 20.9 percent.

Canadian feedlots have struggled with competitive disadvantages to the U.S. and limited cattle supplies. Feedlot placements in Canada dropped sharply in the second half of 2014. Feedlot placements in Alberta and Saskatchewan were down 16.9 percent year over year in the four months from last November through February. March 1 cattle on feed inventories in Alberta and Saskatchewan were down 11.7 percent from one year ago. Feedlot marketings in these two major Canadian cattle feeding provinces were down 14.6 percent in January and February

compared to the same two months last year. Fewer feedlot marketings in Canada impacts Canadian beef production and slaughter cattle exports. Combined January and February U.S. imports of Canadian slaughter cattle were down 34.6 percent year over year, including a 55.1 percent decrease in slaughter steer imports; a 40.8 percent decrease in slaughter heifer imports; and 21.4 percent fewer cull cows imported for slaughter.

Record high U.S. feeder prices and a strong dollar favor Canadian exports of feeder cattle to the U.S. U.S. imports of Canadian feeder cattle increased 37.8 percent in 2014 over the previous year. This increase consisted of a 60 percent year over year increase in feeder heifers exported to the U.S. along with a 7 percent increase in feeder steers exported to the U.S. In the first two months of 2015, total U.S. imports of Canadian feeder cattle are up a more modest 7 percent; the result of a 51.2 percent increase in feeder steer imports combined with a 12.6 percent decrease in feeder heifer exports.

January 1, 2015 Canadian cattle inventories confirmed that cattle herd liquidation continued in 2014 with a beef cow herd of 4.78 million cows, down two percent from the previous year. Beef replacement inventories were down one percent as well, indicating that herd expansion has not yet started in Canada. This is consistent with slaughter and export data indicating that heifer slaughter in Canada was up 9 percent in 2014; 24 percent more slaughter heifers were exported to the U.S. and 60 percent more feeder heifers were exported in 2014 compared to 2013. Decreased feeder and slaughter heifer exports so far in 2015 may indicate that heifer retention is beginning in Canada.

Decreased beef production in Canada in 2015 will hold beef exports close to 2014 levels despite favorable exchange rates. U.S. imports of Canadian beef may moderate in the coming months from the strong year over year increases posted in January and February, though the U.S. may be picking up a larger share of total Canadian beef exports. Slaughter cattle imports from Canada are already down year over year and will likely remain lower due to decreased Canadian feedlot production. Herd rebuilding may result in fewer cull cows exported to the U.S. for slaughter in 2015. U.S. imports of Canadian feeder cattle may also moderate in coming months as a result of tight Canadian cattle supplies and increased heifer retention in Canada. Compared to 2014, Canada is likely to contribute relatively less to U.S. beef supplies, slaughter cattle supplies, and feeder cattle supplies in 2015.

Make a record of twins (or other multiple births)

Glenn Selk, Oklahoma State University Emeritus Extension Animal Scientist

Estimates of the percentage of beef cattle births that produce twins vary. One estimate (Gilmore) puts the percentage at about 0.5% or 1 in every 200 births. Approximately one-half of the sets of twins should contain both a bull and a heifer calf. Make sure to write down these calf numbers of twin births while they are still nursing the cow. Be certain to **not** retain the heifer born twin to a bull as a replacement female.

Freemartinism is recognized as one of the most severe forms of sexual abnormality among cattle. This condition causes infertility in most of the female cattle born twin to a male. When a

heifer twin shares the uterus with a bull fetus, they also share the placental membranes connecting the fetuses with the dam.

A joining of the placental membranes occurs at about the fortieth day of pregnancy, and thereafter, the fluids of the two fetuses are mixed. This causes exchange of blood and antigens carrying characteristics that are unique to each heifers and bulls. When these antigens mix, they affect each other in a way that causes each to develop with some characteristics of the other sex.

Although the male twin in this case is rarely affected by reduced fertility, in over ninety percent of the cases, the female twin is completely infertile. Because of a transfer of hormones or a transfer of cells, the heifer's reproductive tract is severely underdeveloped and sometimes even contains some elements of a bull's reproductive tract. A freemartin is genetically female, but has many characteristics of a male. The ovaries of the freemartin do not develop correctly, and they remain very small. Also, the ovaries of a freemartin do not produce the hormones necessary to induce the behavioral signs of heat. The external vulvar region can range from a very normal looking female to a female that appears to be male. Usually, the vulva is normal except that in some animals an enlarged clitoris and large tufts of vulvar hair exist.

Freemartinism cannot be prevented; however, it can be diagnosed in a number of ways ranging from simple examination of the placental membranes to chromosomal evaluation. The cattleman can predict the reproductive value of this heifer calf at birth and save the feed and development costs if he is aware of the high probability of freemartinism. (Source: "The Causes and Effects of Freemartinism in Cattle" by Laurie Ann Lyon.)

In some cases, there are few, if any, symptoms of freemartinism because the male twin may have been aborted at an earlier stage of gestation. Hidden "freemartins" are often difficult to identify if replacement heifers are purchased. Therefore this is another good reason to cull any open (non-pregnant) replacement heifer soon after her first breeding season.

Cows that are nursing twin calves will require an estimated 13% more energy intake to maintain body condition. The additional suckling pressure on the cow will extend the post-calving anestrus period. Therefore, cows nursing twins will take longer to re-cycle to rebreed for next year's calf crop. In some cases, producers may want to consider early weaning of the twin calves to allow the cow to re-cycle in time to stay with the other cows in the herd.

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