

# U.S. Cattle Herd Is Smallest in 60 Years

by Marcia Merry Baker

Jan. 31—The U.S. cattle herd inventory is now at the level of 1952—60 years ago—when such numbers began to be kept by the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA). Today’s inventory stands at 90.8 million animals, down 2.1% from last year, according to the USDA’s twice-annual cattle numbers report, released Jan. 27; the inventory in 1952 was 88 million. The U.S. population then stood at about 156.5 million, and the world at 2.6 billion; today, the figures are 311 million and 7 billion, respectively.

Despite the huge gains in yields of beef per animal over these 50 years, the current decline in the size of the herd means a fall in U.S. beef output for 2012 over 2011, and the dynamic in play is for severe shortages ahead. This was abetted by the beef cartel exporters sending 20% more U.S. beef abroad in 2011, than in 2010.

Beef cattle operations in the Southern High Plains—Texas and Oklahoma—in particular, are being drastically taken down, as conditions of extreme drought persist, with lack of water for livestock and irrigation, and lack of fodder. This situation results from both long-term, anti-infrastructure policies in effect, and from President Obama’s do-nothing, starvation policies emanating from the expiring British Empire money-markets system.

Over the past year, 1,052,000 beef cows were eliminated from the four-state Southwest area: Texas (down by 13%, losing 660,000 cows); Oklahoma (down by 14%, losing 288,000); New Mexico (down by 11%, losing 53,000); and Kansas (down by 4%, losing 51,000).

Only one inch of rain fell last year in parts of the Texas rangelands, instead of the normal 25 inches. “Flee or slaughter” is the watchword. Thousands of cattle operations have had to radically downsize and sell off stock, or sell out completely and quit. The slaughter rate is killing off the breeding herd.

Lacking emergency response from Washington, ranchers have tried to hang on, with support

from church-run “haylifts” from out of state, and other fallbacks. But this is nowhere near enough to deal with the situation.

The wealthiest ranchers, such as the 150-year-old Four Sixes Ranch in King County, Texas, have relocated their herds 1,000 miles to the north, or even to select sites in Mexico that only money can buy. Four Sixes is the largest ranch in Texas, flush with old oil money, and was able to move at least 4,000 top Black Angus animals, out of its total herd of 6,500, to ranch operations in North Dakota, Montana, and other points north, on land leased for five years. Convoys of 18-wheelers trucked the cattle through the night.

However, these unique contingencies won’t provide for the food supply. What is required are large-scale emergency measures: Save breeding stock, mobilize for hay and water, support extra planting.

## Corn for Livestock

The livestock feed prospects are dire. U.S. corn is continuing to go into ethanol at the rate of 40% of the annual harvest. This crimps domestic livestock feed supplies (despite usage of distillers’ by-product), and corn for export.

In Argentina, the world’s second-largest corn-exporting nation after the United States, accounting for 20% of the world corn trade, the current crop is also stressed by drought and heat, and is expected to come in at the lowest yields in eight years. Large areas of sown crop are being used for silage, or will be abandoned. Instead of a hoped-for 28 to 30 million metric tons of corn harvest, there may be barely 20 mmt this year.



*A Texas Longhorn steer*

Cowboyhat Cattle Co./Steve Parrett