

# Cattle Exports To Japan

(Continued from Page A19)

ary. Calf inventory was 39.6 million head, down 2 percent.

National growth in the economy of a steady 2-3 percent should help keep economic woes at bay. This is the third longest period of economic growth in U.S. history, Moore said, though overall growth, profits, and inflation for most economic sectors will be the same as last year.

Natural disasters could effect the economy negatively, such as the snow out in the Dakotas that has literally buried herds of cattle. Moore indicated that 13,000-100,000 beef animals could be found dead under the snow.

Overall, however, more of our farm income "is coming from off-farm sources," Moore said. "That's good or bad, depending on how you look at it. How many of us have to work off the farm to support our farm habit?"

For beef producers in general, it's time to also look closely at other agricultural sectors to see what impact this could have on them. As an example, Moore pointed out that Perdue is planning to build 200 broiler houses on Maryland's Eastern Shore.

Additionally, more and more grain is being used for the beef and swine industries. Corn use for beef stands out front, with use totally nearly 5 billion bushels last year. Corn exports are totally about 2 billion bushels and corn food for additives and seed stood at 1.6 billion bushels.

Record corn use again could have carryovers low for the second straight year. USDA projections for corn carryover in 1997 are 1.1

billion bushels, which Moore believes are too high. USDA is still looking at the "psychology of second or third-largest corn crops" when making estimates, as corn use increases. Also, "we're getting to the point right now where we have to produce big crops to keep prices of livestock lower," according to the economist.

Overall, there will be fewer animals on feedlot in the future than in the past few years.

Moore pointed out that some producers complain that when the price drops at the farm, it doesn't drop at the retail level.

That's not true, Moore noted. Even though the process starts slowly, the price does decrease at the retail level. The price at the retail level was an average 6 cents per pound lower than the previous year; however, the price did not drop to reflect all the drops the industry took.

## Beef Grading Review, Changes

Martin E. O'Connor, agricultural marketing specialist with the USDA Agricultural Marketing Service, Livestock and Seed Division, spoke about the USDA beef grading programs and recent changes to the system.

In grading, an important factor that the specialists look for is marbling. Marbling "is the highest degree of accuracy (regarding) taste, juiciness, and flavor of meat," and is an important aspect in the grading program.

An important segment of their work is the branded programs for the different beef organizations that utilize the USDA service.

"The branded program is

becoming very popular for different segments of the industry," said O'Connor. These are programs developed under total quality management to allow the organizations to market different cuts of beef and to serve as a product identification and records system.

For one such organization, out of eight million head of cattle that went through an evaluation, only 1/4 of the total qualified for the branded program, or about 1.8 million head. That translates into about 1.34 billion pounds of beef.

Producers should understand the difference between inspection and grading. Inspection involves examining the safety and health of meat processing plants and grading simply looks at the quality of beef.

The service provided by USDA is entirely voluntary. Beef slaughterhouses receive USDA's help to the tune of 100,000 head of cattle per day for grading purposes.

In fiscal year 1996, USDA graded 20.4 billion pounds of beef and certified 12.1 billion pounds. Revenues were \$10.1 million for the grading program and \$7.9 million for certification to the processors. Grading costs are \$36.60 per hour, which work out, on average, to about 37 cents per carcass.

Grading factors include overall maturity, skeletal and lean maturity and physical evaluation of the skeleton. Lean quality, including texture, firmness, and marbling, are also examined. Carcass cutability is figured into the grading process.

O'Connor indicated that he travels to many parts of the country to evaluate the uniform standards of graders in various plants.

O'Connor also spoke about the "B" maturity grade changes taking place now, which will "prevent more than 200 million undesirable eating experiences per year" for consumers, he said, based on surveys.

This means that 1.58 percent of all cattle on average would fall into the change area, affecting aged steers and heiferettes.

About 1.49 percent of the cattle would change from a low choice or select grade to standard.

## Beef Council Update

Matt Perrier, promotions director for the Pennsylvania Beef Council, said that in the next 4-5 years, there will be changes to meat cases in supermarkets to reflect the changes in consumer preferences.

There will be three sections in the case, Perrier indicated.

One case will house steaks and chops, one chicken breasts, and the other ground beef.

The good news is that, while retailers are losing market share of beef sales to food service providers and restaurants, new items will help the industry overall. One such item under test from an Atglen-based company is called the "beef-fita," used as an appetizer that makes use of small strips from the beef shoulder, seasoned Tex-Mex style and deep-fried. Another item is the "home meal replacement,"

commonly known as the HMR — prepared full-serving meals that the consumer merely needs to reheat. They are working on palatability of the meat after it is reheated.

Another item, "roisserie beef," similar to the same style of chicken in some restaurants — the slow-roasted, slow-cooked meat — is under development, according to Perrier.

Consumers want more "perceived convenience" in the food they prepare for families.

The council, according to Perrier, applauds the work of steak-houses around the country to attract many consumers and to improve the marketing of beef items. Nearly 90 percent of all restaurants still serve beef on their menu.

Tammy Weaver, industry relations/compliance manager with the Pennsylvania Beef Council, spoke about the council's dedication to improving beef marketing, now in existence for 10 years.

"It's a good program," she said. "We've been building demand for a decade."

Weaver emphasized the importance of advertising to promote the sale of beef at the supermarket. "Our society is in this rage of convenience," she said, and that factors into consumers' beef buying decisions.

She asked producers to continue to communicate their needs for marketing to the council.

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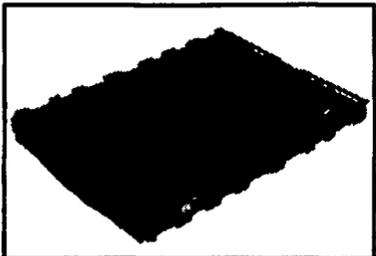
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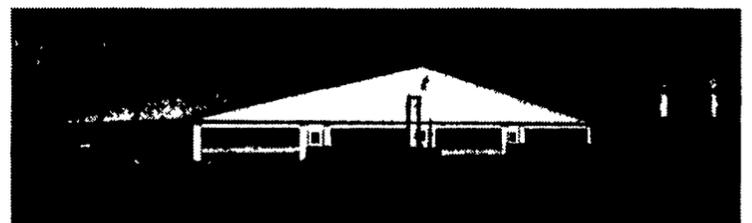
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