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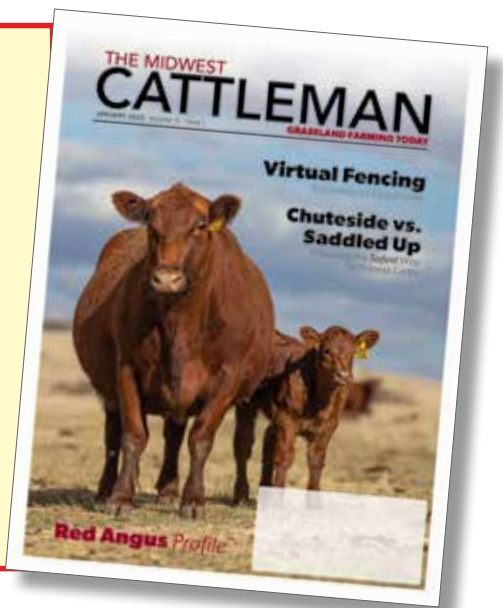


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# THE COWBOY WAY

By Austin Black

**W**ell folks, when winter showed up this year, it decided to stay. As of the third week of January, we've only had a handful of days where temperatures climbed above freezing. I know it's made feeding hay, chopping ice, keeping diesel trucks running and baby calves warm a challenge for some producers. It seems like we go through a flurry of "seasons" in the last few months of the year, then January hits and it truly becomes winter.

But alas, the markets continue to stay strong, the government is officially under new guidance and I feel like this year will be monumental for many of us in more than one way.

I just returned from the Missouri Cattlemen's Association annual state convention, and as always, am inspired and encouraged to stay engaged and stay positive about the future of our industry.

Something that seems to resonate more this year, though, is the need for empowering and encouraging the next generation of producers. For many years, I've heard people in the generation ahead of mine talk about the importance of providing opportunity for the "next generation". I've seen many programs and events that educate young producers about the industry. And I've witnessed highly successful fundraising efforts that provide many scholarships for deserving youth. But one thing I haven't widely seen is a personal interest in the next generation.

It's one thing to sponsor a youth event, donate to a scholarship fundraiser or support programs that educate young producers. But how many older cattle producers speak words of encouragement and motivation to young cattlemen and women? How often is the next generation invited to attend a convention, speak up at a meeting and bring their ideas? How many times are young cattlemen and women given an opportunity to take ownership of their industry?

I hope it's more often than I see.

I've been the recipient of many youth awards and scholarships, and benefited from educational and leadership programs in the beef industry.

But what resonates with me the most, and what has prompted me to stay involved, stay engaged and stay committed to the industry, are the words from successful cattlemen and women who have told me I'm important, I'm smart and I'm welcome at the table.

I still recall conversations with the late Jim McCann, who personally invited me to attend the National Cattlemen's Beef Association convention, and who always made time to thank me for being a part of the industry. He didn't just want me to be involved, he wanted me to succeed.

I also have appreciated the words of Chuck Miller, who has always made a point to say "hi" and has provided more encouragement to be present in the industry than any other cattleman I know. He has created opportunities for me and many others to become leaders in the industry and succeed at any level.

Simply put, these men have told me I bring value and I AM the future. I believe we need more of that in this industry if we truly do expect it to continue to the next generation.

The realities of this industry are challenging. It's never been harder to get started in the cattle business, and yet there's never been as much opportunity and need for young producers to stake their claim. With land turnover expected to increase in the next decade, and fewer young producers willing and able to continue the tradition of beef production, it's imperative that we as an industry take action to create opportunity. And encourage young cattlemen and women to step up to the plate.

Focusing on the next generation is about more than acknowledging them, it's about enabling, encouraging and inviting them to join the ranks.

I will always be grateful for the individuals who invited me and I hope you make a point to do the same.

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# CATTLE MARKETS 2025

## Heifer retention will drive market trends

By Derrell S. Peel, Oklahoma State University Extension Livestock Marketing Specialist

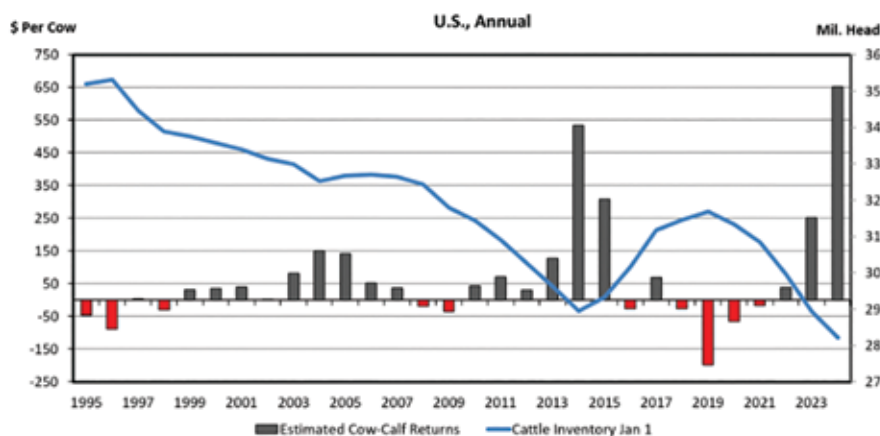


Figure 1: Cow-Calf Returns And Beef Cow Inventory

Average Oklahoma steer calf prices increased over 61% from 2022 to 2024, leading to a sharp increase in average cow-calf returns (Figure 1). Cow-calf returns vary significantly across producers due to widely variable costs of production, but the message is clear – increasingly strong market signals for cow-calf producers to expand the beef cow herd. Positive cow-calf returns typically result,

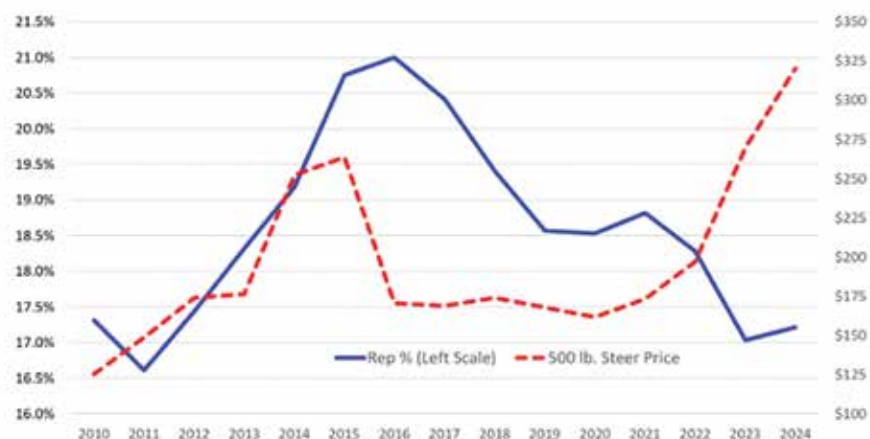


Figure 2: Beef Replacement Heifers as % of Beef Cow Inventory 500lb Steer Price, Southern Plains, \$/cwt.

with a delay, in herd expansion. Figure 1 shows the strong cow herd inventory response to positive returns a decade ago.


New inventory data at the end of the month will confirm current herd status but it is likely that the herd continued to decrease in 2024 and prospects for herd growth in 2025 are limited.

Figure 2 shows a sharp contrast to higher cattle prices leading to the herd rebuild in 2014-2019 compared to the current situation. Heifer retention began in 2012, setting the stage for herd expansion that began in 2014. Increased heifer retention simultaneous with increasing cattle prices squeezed feeder supplies leading to the (then) record feeder prices in 2014 – 2015. Contrast that with the right side of Figure 2 where replacement heifer inventories have shown no significant increase thus far, despite rising feeder cattle prices. Heifer slaughter data through the end of the year, along with heifer on-feed inventories and feeder cattle sales receipts data all suggest little, if any heifer retention in 2024.

Not only did the beef cow herd likely get smaller in 2024, but the limited supplies of replacement heifers also suggests that the beef cow herd may get smaller yet in 2025 or, at best, stabilize at very low inventories. Historically, herd expansions require a year or two to gain momentum before herd inventories begin to increase. That process has not begun at this time.


If heifer retention begins in 2025, several outcomes are expected; tighter feeder supplies will push cattle prices and cow-calf returns higher; retained heifer calves will lead to increased replacement heifer inventories in 2026 and potential herd growth beginning in 2027. Depending on the pace of heifer retention, herd expansion could lead to cyclical production increases and price peaks in the second half of the decade.

If heifer retention does not begin in 2025, the cow herd will continue to dwindle, and cattle supplies will continue to slowly contract with higher cattle prices and a smaller industry until herd rebuilding begins. Either way, cattle prices are expected to remain elevated for at least two to four more years.



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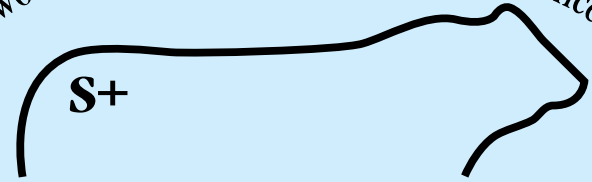
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# COW POWER

## Hereford-sired F1 females shine in the real world

By Wes Ishmael, American Hereford Association

**H**igher pregnancy rates, heavier weaning weights, more fleshing ability and increased cow longevity. Anton Hermes of Hermes Livestock says those are all advantages of running Hereford-sired F1 baldy females.

Hermes Livestock, located in semi-arid eastern Colorado, is a diverse operation with multiple enterprises within the cattle business. They have a commercial cow herd, run stockers and develop heifers for themselves and others, and the operation also breeds mature cows for customers.

Harnessing maternal heterosis by building Hereford-sired F1 baldies is central to all they do for themselves and their customers. However, they also produce some commercial Angus and Red Angus replacement heifers.

### Breeding efficiency

"It's no secret that everyone wants a baldy female," Hermes says, sharing data substantiating the preference. He analyzed data from



Photo: American Hereford Association

*Red or black, Hereford-sired baldies provide Hermes Livestock and its customers added reproductivity and production efficiency.*

3,700 replacement heifers they developed for themselves and customers over the past four years: 970 black baldies, 735 red baldies, 1,120 Angus and 883 Red Angus.

These heifers were AI-bred with conventional (non-sexed) semen in May, followed by clean-up bulls for 55 days, running on grass. They were pregnancy-checked via ultrasound in September.

All told, 64% of the F1 black baldy heifers bred in the first 35 days, which was 9% more than the Angus heifers; 12% more than the Red Angus heifers (see Figure 1).

The F1 red baldies widened the gap further with 69% of them bred in the first 35 days, compared to 55% of the Angus heifers and 52% of the Red Angus heifers.

Hermes points out the purebred breeding performance was strong but fell short of the F1 heifers.

"When you look at what we're getting with heterosis in heifers developed exactly the same way — same age and same maturity — 9-12% more baldy females bred in the first cycle," he says.


Next, Hermes analyzed four years of data from four commercial cow-calf herds, including his own, comprising a total of about 2,900 mature cows (see Figure 2).

For cows aged 3 to 5 years, 2% more of the F1s bred in the first 35 days than their same-aged purebred contemporaries with 2% fewer opens and 4% more scoring at least a body condition score (BCS) 5.5 when pregnancy-checked in October-November.

F1 longevity shone even brighter among the cows aged 6 to 9 — 7% more bred in the first 35 days than their same aged purebred contemporaries with 1% fewer opens and 8% more scoring at least a BCS 5.5 when pregnancy-checked in October-November.


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“As the baldy cows mature, they have less fallout, more bred in the first 35 days and a substantially lower cull rate,” Hermes says.

All of this is why Hermes Livestock started using Hereford bulls again 12 years ago, following a lengthy hiatus when they trended toward straightbred Angus cows. He explains they lost productivity in their cow herd during this period.

“When we went back to Hereford, making these baldy cattle is improving our cow herd and making our replacement females more marketable than they ever were when they were straight blacks or reds,” Hermes says. “Moving baldy heifers in the fall for another \$100-\$200 as a bred heifer is common.”



**Figure 1 – Heifer fertility**

	No. head	Open (%)	Bred 2 <sup>nd</sup> /3 <sup>rd</sup> Cycle (%)	Bred 1 <sup>st</sup> Cycle (%)
F1 – Black Baldy	970	5	31	64
F1 – Red Baldy	735	6	25	69
Angus	1,120	6	39	55
Red Angus	883	8	40	52

**Figure 2 – Mature cow breedback and conditioning**

	Open (%)	Culls (%)	Bred after 35 days (%)	Bred in 1 <sup>st</sup> 35 days (%)	BCS <sup>1</sup> ≥5.5
F1 3-5 years	4	3	15	78	92
Purebred 3-5 years	6	3	15	76	88
F1 6-9 years	7	8	17	68	84
Purebred 6-9 years	9	12	18	61	76

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Supporting local farm businesses to make local food an easy choice

Source: New Growth

**B**uilding up the local farm and food entrepreneurs needed to make local food an easy choice for individuals, schools, grocers, and restaurants is the focus of the 7th annual Farm to Fork Summit. It takes place 9 a.m. to 4 p.m. Friday, March 7, 2025, at the Nevada Community Center, 200 North Ash Street, Nevada, MO.

This annual gathering of Midwest farmers, buyers, and supporters focuses on how to supply the demand for local food from northwest Arkansas to Kansas City. This event is about connecting the local businesses and the markets that allow more family farmers to make a living and more people to find and afford quality local food where they live.

At the Farm to Fork Summit, local food producers learn from each other and connect with others in the supply chain, from distributors to buyers. Event organizers, partners, and expert speakers with decades of hands-on experience bring information about resources and services, from marketing to financing.

Session topics include: Marketing meat direct to consumers, Missouri food code and cottage food laws, selling through regional food

hubs, selling cut flowers, income diversification for specialty crop growers and small farmers, artificial intelligence for small businesses composting and worm castings, building healthy pastures, preparing for a farmers' market and more! And as part of your ticket, enjoy a delicious, locally sourced Farm to Fork lunch! General admission is \$45 online and \$50 at the door. For beginning farmers with 10 years or less experience, email us for a special discount code.

Farm to Fork is hosted by New Growth, a nonprofit community development corporation based in Appleton City, Missouri. A board of area supporting organizations collaborates with New Growth to organize the event. They include University of Missouri Extension, Lincoln University Cooperative Extension, City of Nevada, Missouri FFA, Golden Heartland, Springfield Community Gardens, Kansas City Food Hub, and West Central Missouri Community Action Agency. Plus, many regional businesses championing local food systems sponsor this event.

For more information on tickets, exhibitor space, or to be a sponsor, visit [newgrowthmo.org/farmtofork](http://newgrowthmo.org/farmtofork) or email [info@newgrowthmo.org](mailto:info@newgrowthmo.org).





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# PROFITABLE DIVERSIFICATION

How to take the next step in achieving sustainable profits

By Macey Igo



Photo Courtesy: Jared Sorenson

**A** great cattle rancher is a good steward not only of animals, natural resources and land, but of profitability.

One rancher who exemplifies that balance is Jared Sorenson. He and his wife Selena own Ag Steward, a coaching and consulting business that helps agriculture producers become sustainable and profitable. On their Northeast Nevada ranch, they custom graze cattle, direct market grass-fed beef and sell into branded beef programs.

“With overhead costs increasing, and labor, fuel and insurance more than double, everybody’s feeling that pinch. We’re asking, what is the right enterprise?” Sorenson said. When having these conversations and talking to clients, his first priority is finding out not what they’re dealing with, but who.

“Bud Williams’ very first principle he taught in his marketing class was to know yourself. And that’s where we start with our clients,” he said. “We have them do a Kolbe assessment and from that, we can determine what is their tolerance for risk. How much of an entrepreneurial spirit do they have? If we just say, you need to set these big goals and dream big, some people would thrive with that, and other people, it would paralyze them.”

Mallory Rahe, an agricultural economist with the University of Missouri Extension, helps farmers and ranchers build their businesses through value-added opportunities. Growing up on a diversified farm herself, she’s seen the need for sustainable business models in agriculture.

“One of the reasons I left the farm is there wasn’t enough work,” she said. “I’ve spent the last 15 years working with producers who are trying to diversify. Farming is hard – nothing is guaranteed. Adding value introduces a lot of risks to a business, but it can also open up some exciting opportunities.”

## Asking the Hard Questions

Like Sorenson, Rahe said the farm’s opportunities rely on the type of people running it. She often sees cattle ranches diversify by selling

beef off the farm, but for individuals who struggle with anything from marketing to cold storage, that may not be the right fit. For those individuals, stabilization may be a good option.

“There’s a lot of optimism in beef cattle right now, but we know costs vary a lot. If you don’t have great access to feedstuffs, you might want to just hold tight and focus on improving the basics of your operation. This is what I call stabilizing,” she said. “For some people, it’s not the cost of production, it’s the labor constraints.”

As for selling beef direct, or any other enterprise, just because it works for your friends and neighbors doesn’t mean it’s the right choice for you.

“I’ve probably talked more people out of direct marketing than I’ve talked into it,” Sorenson said. “I’m willing to ask, ‘Is this really what you want to do?’ A lot of times it’s, ‘No, but everybody else is doing it and making good money, so I should be able to, too.’ But if your life is miserable because you’ve got to go do something you don’t enjoy doing, don’t sign up for that.”

Sorenson said it’s common in agriculture to never ask the question of want versus obligation. “What would you do if you didn’t do this? When people are asked that question, they’re like, ‘Nobody ever really ever gave me permission not to do this. This is what I just thought I had to do.’ No, you don’t,” Sorenson said. “You have a choice. We look at who you are as a being, what are you currently doing that’s working, and what are you currently doing that’s not working.”

Once you know what you’re willing to do, you need to know what you’re able to do. “You have to know your cost of production. A lot of people think they do or they have sort of a loose guess, but it’s extremely eye-opening when people sit down and take the time to document it. You just don’t know what you don’t know until you’re really looking at your cost of production,” Rahe said.



Often producers are afraid to physically sit down, get out the computer, and crunch the numbers to find their bottom line, or at least the number that makes it worth it.

“The question for us is, can we market it at a profit?” Sorensen said. “We don’t focus on the breakeven because we don’t want to break even. We focus on a 30% profit margin. If we can do it for a 30% profit margin, we know there’s enough cushion in there that if something unforeseen happens, we still are going to be profitable.”

## Making a Profitable Decision

Once your goals and resources are clear, it’s time to start exploring opportunities.

“We’ve seen producers be fairly successful working collectively,” Rahe said. “Maybe this is part of a broader strategy where there is a community supported agriculture, or CSA. You may have vegetable growers and a beef producer joins the mix, and they are collectively offering the opportunity to sign up for fresh local food on a weekly basis. That is a different kind of way to reach your target customer.”

That collaborative effort has proven successful in many areas, especially for beef producers who may not have the finances, labor or skills to market the product themselves.

“The CSA model has been morphing into what’s called food stops, which are off-farm retail locations collectively supported by multiple producers bringing their product. They’re trying to share the risks and expense of reaching customers,” she said. “I can’t afford to rent a retail space on my own, but some vegetable farmers have started working with livestock producers in our state and tell their customers, we can also offer you pork, eggs or fresh milk.”

The same focus on partnership proves effective in agritourism, which saw rapid growth during the COVID era. While not every farm is well suited for agritourism based on location, ability to advertise, etc., these businesses create an opportunity for different sectors to come together and receive mutual benefit.

“I’ve seen models where people will operate their own agritourism entity or collaborate with a neighbor. A great way to sell a lot of hamburgers is to fry it up at an agritourism operation,” she said.

“Or they can test the market for local products by selling through a neighbor’s agritourism store. It’s a chance to expose a largely urban audience to the farm experience, and a lot of those customers are highly interested in buying local, so let’s not limit them to what a single farm can produce.”



Photo Courtesy Mallory Rahe

*Mallory Rahe helps farmers and ranchers build their business through value-added opportunities.*

Rahe has seen producers sell their product at a loss because they don’t know their production cost and they’re attempting to do something outside their expertise. Partnerships help avoid this and give producers better command of returns.

“One reason I like value-added agriculture is, when done well, a producer can have more control over the prices they’re selling their products at. You just have to make sure there is somebody out there who’s willing to purchase at those prices before you invest a lot of time and resources,” she said.

Both Rahe and Sorensen agree the ultimate resource a producer can have when trying something new is a mentor.

“Producers are often very willing to share their mistakes, to help people avoid those mistakes. Get involved in local ag organizations where the active farmers are, the like-minded farmers willing to try something a little bit different,” Rahe said. “There’s somebody out there who’s probably tried to do what you are thinking about doing. You need to find those people.”



Photo Courtesy Jared Sorensen

*Jared Sorensen coaches farmers and ranchers to create more profitable and viable operations.*

“There is so much opportunity in agriculture right now. If you’re just starting out, start out on the right foot. Even if you’re wanting to scale into a new enterprise, the same thing applies,” Sorensen said.

“Find a mentor who is doing what you’re doing and doing it well. Take them out to lunch, buy them dinner, offer to pay, go shadow them, whatever it takes, because you’re going to learn so

much from that versus trying to recreate it on your own.”

Both Sorensen and Rahe are happy to help individuals in the process of becoming better stewards of land and profitability. Sorensen serves producers nationwide, and Rahe encourages producers in other states to take advantage of their state’s extension resource.

Last but not least, Sorensen’s main piece of advice is actually where he recommends starting.

“Be super prayerful. God knows best what you need to do. He might ask us to do things that we don’t want to do, but He’s not going to ask us to do something that we’re not capable of doing well. Make sure that’s part of your decision making,” Sorensen said. 🐄

*Editor’s Note: To hear the full interviews and learn more about diversifying your operation, visit [www.midwestcattleman.com](http://www.midwestcattleman.com).*

# FOOD & FARM POLICY FOR NEW YEAR

## Passage of American Relief Act Brings Changes to 2025

By National Sustainable Agriculture Coalition

The 2024 calendar year ended with a flurry of Congressional activity. In the early morning of December 21, 2024, Congress passed, and the President signed the American Relief Act, averting a government shutdown. Beyond extending government funding, the American Relief Act also included – and excluded – numerous policy provisions that will bring lasting impacts to the U.S. food and farm system for decades to come. This post examines the American Relief Act and looks ahead to what a busy 2025 has in store for federal food and farm policy.

### American Relief Act

On Friday, December 20, the fifty-one-page American Relief Act (P.L. 118-158) was approved by the House of Representatives 366-34 and subsequently approved by the Senate 85-11 just after midnight on Saturday, December 21. In the days leading up to passage, the size and scope of the legislation shifted significantly amidst fluctuating negotiations. Throughout these negotiations, federal food and farm policy observers closely tracked several provisions. These included a second extension of the 2018 Farm Bill; agricultural disaster assistance funding; incorporation of the Inflation Reduction Act (IRA) conservation

program funding; economic aid for farmers; and funding for programs without farm bill baseline (the so-called “orphan” or “stranded” programs). These stranded programs have been unable to issue new funding since the Farm Bill expired at the end of September 2024 without an extension.

During the initial stages of negotiations earlier that week, lawmakers had struck a bipartisan deal roughly 1,000 pages long. This bipartisan deal disappointingly omitted key conservation funding for farmers, but included agriculture disaster assistance funding and funding for the “stranded” Farm Bill programs, alongside economic aid for commodity farmers. However, at the 11th hour, negotiations were heavily influenced by President-elect Trump which, after a couple of false starts, ultimately led to the initial 1,000-page bipartisan deal being winnowed down to just 51 pages. This downsizing occurred in just a matter of hours and excluded many important policy provisions as a result. While Congress ultimately averted a government shutdown and extended the Agriculture Improvement Act of 2018 (2018 Farm Bill) until September 30, 2025, the final deal included several major disappointments, picking winners and losers in farm country.



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## Government Funding

The American Relief Act extends FY2024 government funding levels – first established by the Consolidated Appropriations Act of 2024 (CAA, P.L.118-42) – through March 14, 2025. Although agriculture programs – which fall under non-defense discretionary spending – would almost certainly benefit from the increase under the revised cap which would be triggered if a CR was in place on April 30, the revised caps were devised to incentivize Congress to enact full year appropriations legislation by April 30, 2025, under threat of steep cuts to defense spending. The American Relief Act runs through March 14, 2025, in large part to ensure lawmakers can avoid this cutoff.

Ultimately, however, the American Relief Act's continuation of FY2024 funding levels only prolongs reduced funding for many critical sustainable agriculture programs. These programs include: Conservation Technical Assistance (CTA), the Grazing Lands Conservation Initiative (GLCI), the Sustainable Agriculture Research and Education (SARE) Program, the Office of Urban Agriculture and Innovative Production (OUAIP), Farmers Market Nutrition Program (FMNP), Rural Business Development Grants (RBDG), Rural Microentrepreneur Assistance Program (RMAP), and the National Sustainable Agriculture Information Service (ATTRA). The continuation of these cuts and others – even for a short time – will result in limited impacts and ultimately more farmers, ranchers, and rural businesses being turned away due to lack of funding.

## Conservation Funding

For a brief moment during negotiations leading up to the final 51-page American Relief Act, it seemed possible, even likely, that Congress would rescind all unspent Inflation Reduction Act (IRA) conservation program funds and relocate them as part of the permanent, mandatory baseline budget for Farm Bill conservation programs. As a reminder, Congress provided generational one-time funding increases for specific conservation programs through budget reconciliation in 2022. In total, four key Farm Bill conservation programs received just over \$18 billion, with \$3.25 billion for the Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP), \$8.45 billion for the Environmental Quality Incentive Program (EQIP), \$4.95 billion for the Regional Conservation Partnership Program (RCPP), and \$1.4 billion for the Agriculture Conservation Easement Program (ACEP). Each program received a lump sum of funds for fiscal years FY2023-FY2026, all of which were to remain available for use until FY31.

Using unspent FY2025 and FY2026 funds as well as projected cost savings from moving the funding into programs' baseline, the American Relief Act could have added as much as \$14 billion to these four popular conservation programs' combined budgets. This funding would have then been reauthorized in future farm bills, providing tens of billions of additional dollars in coming decades to support the long line of producers choosing to add conservation practices to their operations. Such an investment would have been a generational win for farmers and natural resource conservation. This would also have been a long term strategic investment in USDA's ability to help producers make their operations more resilient and productive in the face of extreme weather and volatile input prices.

However, in a disappointing and confounding twist, Congress abandoned this course, removed any such provisions from the American Relief Act, and left the unspent FY2025 and FY2026 conservation funds with USDA to be spent as originally intended. This means that for farmers today, for another year at least, there is still more money than ever before to enroll in CSP, EQIP, RCPP, and ACEP. In years

to come, competition to enroll in these same programs will rise sharply for farmers as the funding cliff Congress failed to resolve hits beginning in FY2027 and as inflation continues to erode the static budgets of conservation programs. This failure to seize a cost-free opportunity to provide for the needs of farmers in both the short and long term will haunt lawmakers for years and unnecessarily limit farmers for decades.

## "Stranded" Programs

Similar to IRA funding, during negotiations leading up to the final American Relief Act, it seemed likely that funding for farm bill "stranded programs" would be included in the final deal. These programs are generally newer, smaller farm bill programs that do not continue in the farm bill baseline because the authorizing and budget committees did not provide them a baseline to continue without funding from a new Farm Bill or a special provision in a CR. Currently, 21 Farm Bill programs do not have baseline funding. They received roughly \$906 million in mandatory spending authority or less than 0.3% of the \$428 billion total mandatory spending projected for all farm bill programs over FY19-FY23.

The Farm Bill extension for FY24 provided one year of funding to 19 of the 21 stranded programs and for a brief moment, it seemed likely the extension for FY25 would provide another year of funding as well. However, at the last minute, Congress removed funding for these programs from the final package, leaving these programs, and the farmers and food system workers who utilize them, with an uncertain future. Without guaranteed funding, progress made in the areas supported by these programs is expected to stall, potentially setting back years of advancement in agricultural research, rural support, and conservation efforts. Programs of particular note that will go without additional funding are the National Organic Certification Cost Share Program (OCCSP), the 1890s Scholarship Program, and the Organic Production and Market Data Initiatives (ODI). These three programs serve a variety of purposes from supporting farmers transitioning to organic, to bolstering educational and career opportunities for students from rural or underserved communities around the country.

These programs have small price tags but big impacts across all fifty states, from improving farm system efficiency, increasing farmers' and ranchers' resilience to extreme weather, supporting young farmers, and growing market access. For now, the future of these programs remains unclear. Most programs likely have some leftover funding from FY24 and agencies will continue to operate these programs until that leftover funding runs out. However, it is unlikely that we will see new requests for applications open up for any of these programs in the near future. NSAC will be looking further into the emerging consequences as these programs go unfunded, so stay tuned for a deeper dive.

## Economic Aid

While lawmakers lacked the gumption to reinvest available IRA funding into conservation programs or provide modest funding to support stranded farm bill programs, they appear to have had no trouble identifying \$10 billion in economic assistance for certain commodity farmers. Eligible commodities include wheat, corn, soybeans, cotton, rice, and peanuts. The discrepancy revealed much about which farm businesses the new Congress will be inclined to prioritize (i.e. commodity producers), and which will continue to be left behind (i.e. specialty crop, small to -mid-scale, and diversified operations).

The American Relief Act structured economic aid payments to be made to eligible producers whose expected gross return per acre is less than the expected cost of production. However, to determine expected gross return, the formula does not incorporate indemnities already

*Continued on Page 19*

# STRATEGIES TO AVOID FEDERAL ESTATE TAX

## How estate planning can protect your farm & family

By Jesse McCurry

Estate planning these days is focused heavily on pushing value down below the federal estate tax exemption of \$13.6 million (or \$27.2 million for married couples). Estates that exceed those exemption levels are subject to the 40% marginal federal estate tax.

These are big numbers, and most farmers will look at them and think they would never have to worry about estate taxes. But consider these two factors:

1 - The federal exemption is scheduled to be slashed in half as of Jan. 1, 2026, pushing thousands of taxpayers' estates into estate tax territory.

2 - For many farmers, the tremendous appreciation in the value of land and equipment over the past several years may have, indeed, elevated their estates to estate tax territory. If you have any question about the size of your estate, it may be time for a valuation.

### How the Estate Tax Works

The federal estate tax is a marginal tax, meaning it applies only to the portion of an estate that is above the federal exemption. In other words, if an unmarried farmer dies and their estate totals \$16.5 million, to calculate the estate tax you would subtract \$13.6 million (the current amount that is exempt from the estate tax) from the estate's value of \$16.5 million.

The remainder is \$2.9 million. The federal estate tax would be applied only to this "marginal" amount, not the full value of the estate. Hence, the 40% estate tax in this case would total \$1.16 million.

But consider what could happen if that same farmer were to die after Jan. 1, 2026, when the estate tax exemption is scheduled to be reduced to about \$7 million. The marginal portion of the estate subject to the estate tax then would be \$9.5 million, and the estate tax would be \$3.8 million – more than a 200% increase.



Photo: Adobestock.com

In addition, the farmer's estate may be liable for state estate taxes, depending on where the farm is located. Kansas and Arkansas do not have a state estate tax. Nebraska also has no estate tax, but it does levy an inheritance tax on beneficiaries.

An estate tax is levied on the estate of a deceased person, and the tax is paid out of the proceeds of the estate. An inheritance tax is levied on the beneficiaries of an estate after the estate's proceeds have been distributed.

### How an Estate is Valued – Implications for Farmers

The calculation of an estate is fairly simple. It is based on the value of total assets minus liabilities.

For farmers, this means the value of land, farm vehicles, equipment, livestock, accounts receivable and other farm-related assets are added to the value of personal assets such as bank accounts, investments and retirement plans, houses, property, vehicles and other items. Liabilities such as farm and personal debt are backed out of the total to reach the final calculation of estate value.

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That's why estate planning is even more critical today for farmers than in the past, and must be considered an on-going process since the estate tax is poised to affect more taxpayers and the value of land and other assets continues to rise.

## Estate Planning Strategies for Farmers

For farmers concerned about avoiding estate taxes, several strategies can be utilized to lower the overall value of their estates or place assets into entity structures that will protect them. Here are a few:

**Gifting:** In anticipation of the change in the federal estate tax exemption, many farmers have already begun gifting portions of their land and other assets to family members who will take over the farm operation after the owner dies. Gifting must be done in consultation with a trusted advisor, as there are tax consequences for all parties.

**Legacy Trust:** A farm owner and his son manage the farm together and the son has begun to build his own equity. They have started to transition the operation to the son, and there's a grandson just graduating from high school who will also join the team. The owner established a legacy trust, which is an irrevocable trust that allowed him to set aside assets for his son and grandson. The trust functions as a separate estate, which minimizes the impact of estate taxes and protects it from creditors. The legacy trust doesn't prohibit the land from being sold, but it does protect the corpus, which is the property or premise of the trust. The trust will last for 250 years, during which time it will never be included in any of the heirs' estates. If the land were to be sold, the proceeds could not be distributed until the trust expires after 250 years.

**Revocable Trust:** A revocable trust bypasses the probate process when an owner dies, which significantly simplifies the transfer of the estate for the heirs. These are commonly used by farm owners. One advantage is that there is no requirement to file a tax return for the trust until the owner dies. As the name suggests, a revocable trust can be altered or canceled by the grantor during his or her lifetime.

**Irrevocable Trust:** An irrevocable trust moves the assets from the grantor's control to that of the beneficiary, consequently reducing the value of the person's estate and protecting the assets from creditors. Irrevocable trusts cannot be amended or canceled without permission of the trust's beneficiaries or by court order, although rules vary by state. For a farm owner, an irrevocable trust lowers the value of their estate for estate tax purposes.

**Limited Liability Corporation (LLC) or Limited Partnership (LP):** Putting the land portion of the estate into an LLC or LP can bypass probate. An LLC typically has two or more partners, each of whom has limited liability and each of whom has decision-making responsibilities. An LP also has two or more partners, but only one assumes full liability and decision-making responsibilities. Assets that are in LLCs or LPs are discounted in value from what they would be without that structure, due to the reduced authority of the owner to make decisions. If an LLC has five members with equal decision-making authority, any one member has no more than 20% control over the assets. This results in

a marketplace discount that can, for example, dilute the value of a \$15 million estate down to \$11 million, which is below the current federal exemption.

**Charitable Lead Trust:** A charitable lead trust is a type of irrevocable trust that provides for regular payments to a designated charity for a specified period of time such as 20 years, then distributes the corpus of the estate to beneficiaries. It allows beneficiaries to inherit larger sums than they would without it.

## Time is Running Out

The change in the federal estate tax exemption is 12 months away, and it's anyone's guess whether Congress will step in and make the current exemption permanent. There is no longer any time left to wait for that.

If you have not begun the process of updating your estate plan, contact an Adams Brown advisor.

Jesse McCurry can be reached at [JMcCurry@adamsbrownncpa.com](mailto:JMcCurry@adamsbrownncpa.com). 



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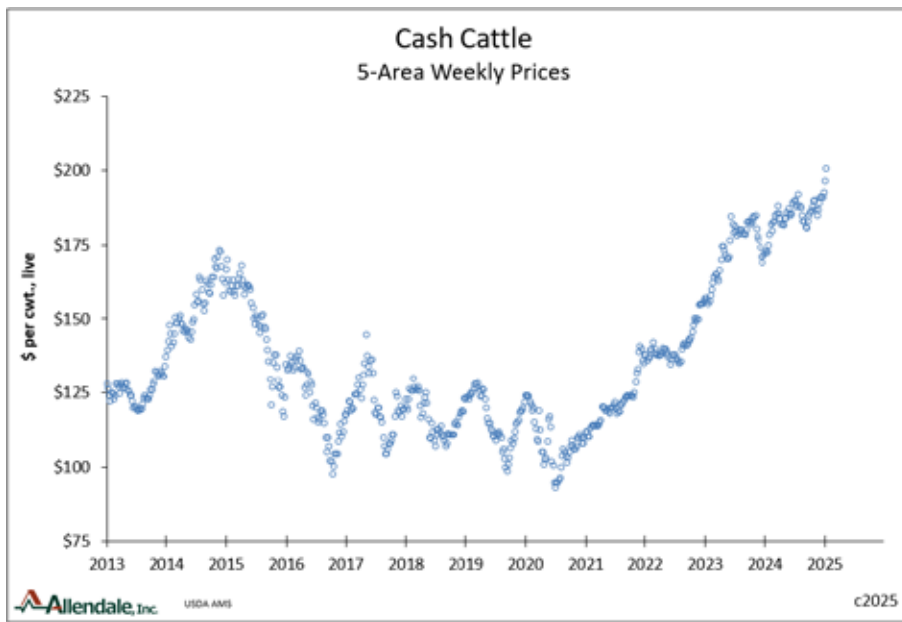
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# ALLENDALE MARKET REPORT



## Live Cattle

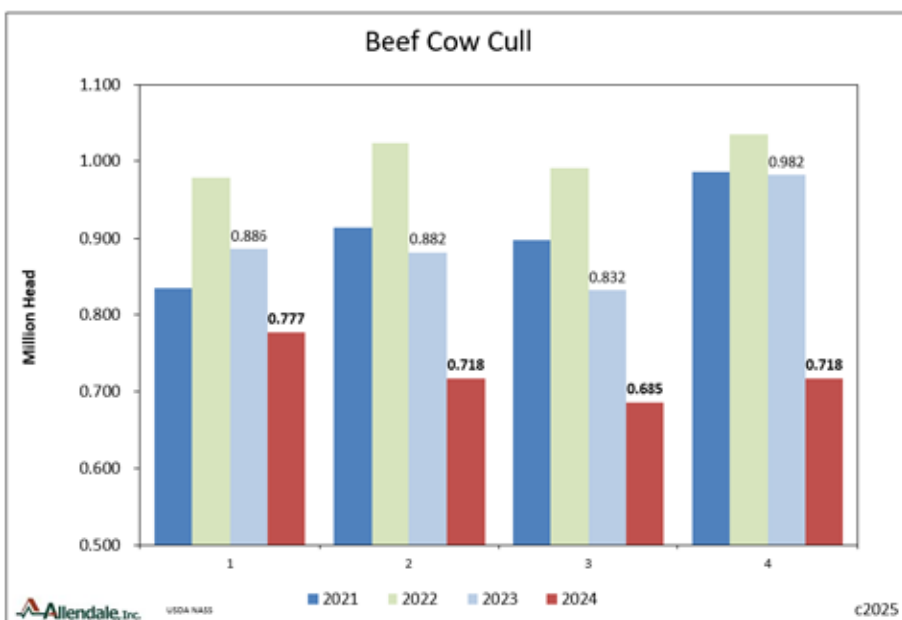
Since the November 22 closure of the Mexican border due to screwworm, cash cattle has picked up \$8 to \$10. In our view, recent cash cattle trades over \$200, +17% year over year, have factored in both a full border closure as well as cold weather. Mexico supplies us with 4% of our calves and feeders. Along with that you can count on January cold reducing weights by 1% to 2%. This brings us to a 6% potential production impact. In traditional years, every 1% change in beef production would equal a 1.5% change in price. In 2023 – 2026, this price reaction is exaggerated, from 2% to 3%. While we feel cash cattle may stabilize here until the border is re-opened, there is still potential for futures to see appreciation if the border is not re-opened soon. Current futures are only +3% to +9% year over year.

Despite numerous factors suggesting lower income citizens are moderately struggling with retail prices, +3.5% year over year against a beef supply that is -1.6%, suggest no real consumer pushback. Consumers hold a special place in their hearts for beef, separate from pork and chicken.

## Takeaway

*What is the update for feed pricing?*

USDA has lowered US corn ending stocks for seven months straight. The corn story has changed from a heavy supply year to now a normal one. These stocks, separate from a trade policy discount, would imply nearby futures at \$5.60. Our view, \$5.00, holds a 60 cent trade policy discount. Tests of \$4.60 July, not expected to be seen for some time, would be an area for procurement.



## Feeder Cattle

The main question right now is whether expansion has started. Based on beef cow slaughter, -18% year over year in Q3 and a full -27% in Q4, perhaps it has. The next question, which we'll soon get an answer to, is whether heifer retention has changed. This story is still quite positive. For the first 1 ½ years of expansion we'll see a supply decline as those females are held back from the feedlot. In addition, the packing industry's misguided capacity increase into 2026 insures the live animal level will see a greater share of the wholesale dollar.



## Takeaway

*What is the update with feeder cattle procurement?*

In prior issues all inflows to the feedlot were recommended to be locked in through March needs via futures. We would hold from new long term procurement until May feeder futures fall to \$250.



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distributed or earmarked to these farms. This means that this new economic assistance will be distributed in addition to payments from the Federal Crop Insurance Program, the Noninsured Crop Disaster Assistance Program (NAP), the Agricultural Risk Coverage (ARC) and Price Loss Coverage (PLC) commodity programs, and supplemental assistance for natural disasters authorized in this American Relief Act – even if those payments are sufficient to mitigate a farmer’s financial loss.

Proponents of this economic assistance claimed that 2024 was a uniquely catastrophic year for commodity farmers. But an honest look at USDA data dispels that myth. In 2022, net farm income shattered previous records at \$182 billion, driven by high commodity prices and direct government payments. By December 2024, that pinnacle was projected to level at \$140.7 billion, placing net farm income – a measure of profit – markedly above its 20-year inflation-adjusted average, \$121.4 billion.

NSAC believes strongly that targeted assistance to farmers experiencing real need is an important and necessary function of the federal government. But bolstering profits for the country’s highest-earning farmers is a waste of limited government resources and is an insult to a majority of farmers, who tend to be at higher financial risk yet unable to access farm safety net programs altogether.

### New Year, New Congress

With the American Relief Act close in the rearview mirror, we turn the page to 2025, the 119th Congress, and the incoming Trump Administration. As is always the case with a new Congress and new Administration, the agenda is long.

Early in 2025, Congress will focus its attention on approving the incoming Administration’s nominees to lead the federal agencies, approving FY2025 appropriations by March 14, and beginning a new budget reconciliation process that is expected to include a wide array of provisions ranging from tax to energy. For close observers of federal food and farm policy, it is as important to note what is being included in budget reconciliation as how it is being paid for. To fund what is likely to amount to billions or even trillions of dollars worth of tax cuts and other initiatives, lawmakers will seek to offset these costs through cuts or “reforms” elsewhere, including to the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) and potentially popular conservation funds from the IRA that have not yet been spent.

Amidst this initial burst of activity, Congress will also begin plodding – yet again – toward a new Farm Bill authorization. After failing to pass a new Farm Bill in 2023 and 2024, lawmakers now face a narrower path to passing a Farm Bill in 2025 or 2026 given

the slim margin of control Republicans maintain in each chamber of Congress. As in the 118th Congress, prioritizing bipartisanship seems the only plausible path to completing a Farm Bill before 2027. 🐄



Photo: Adobestock.com

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# 2025 PICKS UP WHERE 2024 LEFT OFF

By Will Secor, Ph.D., University of Georgia Assistant Professor & Extension Livestock Economist

Cattle markets are off to a hot start in 2025. All through the supply chain from beef markets to feeder cattle markets, prices are up significantly year-over-year. Continuing tight supplies and strong demand remain the driving forces behind these price movements.



Boxed beef prices are up about 16% year-over-year and moved higher in the second week of January compared to the first reading of the year. Direct fed steer prices also increased this week by about 2% compared to last week and up 17% year-over-year. It is notable that these year-over-year price increases come

The Markets		Week of 1/10/25	Week of 1/3/25	Week of 1/12/24
5-Area Fed Steer	all grades, live weight, \$/cwt	\$202.58	\$198.93	\$173.47
	all grades, dressed weight, \$/cwt	\$320.25	\$314.96	\$273.70
Boxed Beef	Choice Value, 600-900 lb., \$/cwt	\$329.02	\$324.58	\$283.44
	Choice-Select Spread, \$/cwt	\$21.40	\$29.52	\$17.26
700-800 lb. Feeder Steer	Montana 3-market, \$/cwt	\$288.41	--	\$243.24
	Nebraska 7-market, \$/cwt	\$293.75	\$282.57	\$240.03
	Oklahoma 8-market, \$/cwt	\$274.21	--	\$220.71
500-600 lb. Feeder Steer	Montana 3-market, \$/cwt	\$355.42	--	\$305.50
	Nebraska 7-market, \$/cwt	\$362.10	\$350.53	\$307.71
	Oklahoma 8-market, \$/cwt	\$338.96	--	\$282.41
Feed Grains	Corn, Omaha, NE, \$/bu (Thursday)	\$4.47	\$4.53	\$4.65
	DDGS, Nebraska, \$/ton	\$170.40	\$170.50	\$216.00

Data Source: USDA-AMS Market News as compiled by LMIC

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amid higher head counts moving through negotiated cash markets this week.

In feeder cattle markets, prices are up across the country and across weights. 700-800 lb. feeder steer prices are up roughly 20% in the Plains and much of the Southeast. Some areas have seen more substantial increases (e.g., Oklahoma at around 24%), while others more moderate (e.g., Mississippi at around 16%). Heifer prices in this weight range have seen similar price increases.

At lower weights, prices are also higher. However, different regions have seen more pronounced differences. Many parts of the Southeast have seen 500-600 lb. steer prices proportionally higher than heavier weight feeder steers. For example, 700-800 lb. steers in Kentucky increased 23% year-over-year, while 500-600 lb. steer prices increased slightly more at 26%. 400-500 lb. steer prices in Kentucky were up by 34% year-over-year. In contrast, many western states saw prices increase proportionately less for lighter-weight feeder cattle compared to their heavier-weight counterparts.

Overall, 2025 has picked up where 2024 left off. Prices continue to move higher year-over-year. Demand appears to be steady to strong as reflected in last year's projected large beef disappearance and higher beef prices. Moreover, additional macroeconomic data, such as the recent jobs report, suggests that the overall economy could support continued beef consumption in the year ahead.

Additionally, cattle supplies remain tight in 2025. While aggregate supplies (i.e., overall U.S. cattle inventories) are unlikely to change in the short term, there are reports that feeder cattle imports from Mexico could begin again later this month. This could create downward pressure to some feeder cattle prices in the weeks after imports are allowed again, whenever that occurs. However, overall cattle inventory will remain constrained in the year ahead supporting higher prices going forward.

Courtesy of Livestock Marketing Information Center 



Photo Adobestock.com

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# FTC FILES RIGHT TO REPAIR LAWSUIT

## John Deere issues statement

By Matthew Grassi, Farm Journal

The Federal Trade Commission has filed a lawsuit along with the states of Minnesota and Illinois against Deere for allegedly violating U.S. competition laws by restricting access to key repair information and diagnostic tools.

It is bone-chillingly cold throughout the Midwest, yet the Right to Repair issue is heating up once again.

Farm Journal Washington correspondent Jim Wiesemeyer learned early Wednesday morning that the U.S. Federal Trade Commission (FTC) is filing a lawsuit against Deere & Co. for allegedly violating U.S. competition laws.

The lawsuit was filed on Jan. 15, 2025, in U.S. District Court for the Northern District of Illinois Western Division.



Photo: AdobeStock.com

Wiesemeyer shared the following summary of key points from Deere's response:

- **Commitment to repair access:** John Deere emphasized its long-standing dedication to customer self-repair, noting its history of publishing manuals, selling parts directly, and providing digital tools like Customer Service ADVISOR.
- **Defense of innovation:** The company stated that the lawsuit "punishes innovation and pro-competitive product design."
- **Settlement efforts:** John Deere disclosed ongoing settlement negotiations with the FTC prior to the lawsuit and criticized the agency for relying on "inaccurate information and assumptions."
- **Recent initiatives:** Highlights included the launch of Equipment Mobile in 2023, upcoming upgrades to the John Deere Operations Center, and a pilot program to enhance farmer's repair options.

### What happens next?

According to a post at [FTC.gov](https://www.ftc.gov), once the agency files a lawsuit the respondent – in this case, John Deere – has the right to contest the charges. FTC may then issue a final order, which can be appealed to the courts. The agency may also seek civil (i.e. financial) damages or request an injunction against Deere.

According to the Jan. 15 filing, Plaintiff's counsel has asked for an injunction against John Deere. The lawsuit requests "a permanent injunction and other equitable relief against Deere to prevent its unlawful conduct in or affecting commerce in violation of Section 5(a) of the FTC Act" along with several state statutes in Illinois and Minnesota.


Farm Journal has reached out to its contacts in the ag law realm to find out what the implications are if an injunction is granted against Deere in Illinois and Minnesota, and what that would mean for Deere customers in those states. We'll update with more information as soon as we have it.

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# Reds in the GREEN HILLS

MARCH 15, 2025 | 12 PM

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### Why is FTC filing against Deere?

Reuters and other news sources confirm the agency has been actively investigating John Deere since 2021.

Weisemeyer has been following the situation closely. He has learned the agency claims Deere's equipment design often necessitates proprietary software available only to authorized dealers, which in turn limits farmers and independent repair shop's ability to perform repairs.

Deere had previously agreed in January 2023, through an accord with the American Farm Bureau Federation, to expand access to its repair tools, but according to Weisemeyer and reporting from Bloomberg, concerns over compliance with that agreement persist.

According to reporting from online publication Agriculture Dive, a court last year ruled against the heavy equipment giant's bid to dismiss a similar lawsuit from a group of farmers.

In yet another twist in this ongoing saga, FTC Commissioner Andrew N. Ferguson has issued a dissenting opinion, which is cosigned by FTC Commissioner Melissa Holyoak. President Trump announced on Dec. 10 that Ferguson will serve as the new Chair of the FTC under his administration.

### Deere's news release on

#### expanding self-repair solutions

On Jan., 14, 2025, John Deere issued a news release outlining its commitment to expanding access to various digital tools and resources to help independent repair technicians and farmers diagnose equipment and make repairs. The full statement is posted to Deere's online newsroom.

The statement details what Deere calls its "Commitment to Repairability" and includes a list of tools that are available today to "support customers throughout their machine ownership and repair journey."

Deere also writes that a "latest addition to Deere's suite of digital solutions will further empower customers and independent repair technicians by, among other things, enabling them to reprogram Deere-manufactured electronic controllers." The new capabilities are being integrated into the John Deere Operation's Center, Deere adds, and will "offer more comprehensive solutions for

diagnosing and repairing equipment while ensuring machine reliability, safety, and compliance."

The manufacturer also says it will have additional announcements regarding a "customer and independent repair technician pilot" which is due to launch in the U.S. and Canada by the second half of 2025.

The news release directs interested parties to visit [Deere.com/repair](https://www.deere.com/repair).



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# CAPITOL HILL CONVERSATIONS

The 2025 policy priorities that you need to know

By Austin Black



Photo Courtesy USCA

Every year, lobbyists and legislators convene in the Capitol halls to bring protection and progress to their constituents. As new bills are introduced and policies are voted on, it's an important time for cattlemen and women to participate in the legislative process.

2025 is already slated to be an exciting year with the new administration taking office. Additionally, though, many state congressional assemblies are welcoming new members and the U.S. Congress is experiencing a large shift in political seats. The combination has many agricultural organizations ready to take action, and positions cattle producers to be a vital component of the legislative process.

## Protecting the State

Kansas Livestock Association (KLA) Vice President of Legal and Government Affairs, Aaron Popelka, said there are six priorities they plan to discuss at the state level this year. Two of these priorities are continued from previous sessions which relate to foreign entity land ownership and the Kansas Corporation Commission.

Currently, Kansas has a corporate farm law that limits foreign land ownership by foreign entities. But with an increasing interest in protecting national security, the Kansas legislature drafted a bill preventing land ownership by any government, business or citizen of six countries the U.S. considers foreign adversaries. Those countries include China, Russia, Iran, Cuba, Venezuela and North Korea.



Photo Courtesy KLA

Aaron Popelka acts as Vice President of Legal & Government Affairs for KLA

focused on national security and is not overly restrictive of real estate markets," Popelka said.

Popelka said the KLA generally desires a free-market policy with limited government involvement, based on its member-adopted policies. But with key U.S. military installations in the state, the KLA board felt some legislative constraints on land purchases by the above adversarial countries were acceptable. While the bill passed in the House and Senate last year, it was vetoed by the Kansas Governor and the issue will continue to be a priority for legislative leaders. "KLA plans to work with the legislature to ensure the bill is

The other primary issue concerns the Kansas Corporation Commission. Following the approval of the Grain Belt Express and Blackberry interstate transmission lines, Kansas residents faced the consequences of inadequate planning during the siting process. "A lot of our members, particularly around the Blackberry Line, have felt the company didn't work well with landowners or pay attention to setback recommendations on homes and livestock facilities," Popelka said.

The current commission is appointed by the governor and Kansas residents are concerned there isn't a strong connection to the public and landowner interests. KLA hopes to change the commission seats to be elected individuals, rather than government appointed.

Additional policies KLA is supporting this year relate to property taxes and non-resident hunting licenses.

Over several years, property taxes in Kansas have continued to rise.

Popelka said the challenge in reducing taxes is that collection occurs at both the state and local level. Currently, the state applies 21.5 mills to property tax, which is largely used to fund education. A mill is \$1 per \$1,000 of assessed value. The remaining approximately 85% of property tax is levied by local taxing authorities. "We're working with the legislature to really hone in on the 21.5 state mills and reduce those to get some property tax relief," Popelka said.



In addition to this goal, though, KLA is also advocating against capping valuation increases to 3%. "There's a lot of confusion between valuation and property tax," he said. "Property tax is a tax on wealth. And we need to get the actual value of an asset to create the valuation."

When trying to cap valuation increases, the issue arises that different classes of real estate increase in value at different rates.

"In Kansas, we're short on houses, so residential properties have increased in value by more than 3%. Sometimes by double digits," Popelka said. "But commercial, agriculture, utility and other real land asset classes haven't grown more than 3%. So when you cap one asset class, all it does is shift the burden from residential to agriculture because the local governments are going to collect the same amount of taxes, it's just a matter of who's paying it."

Not entirely agriculture related, but still relevant to cattle producers, is non-resident hunting license regulations.

While most non-resident deer hunting licenses are acquired through a draw, the state allows non-resident landowners or tenants to purchase lower cost tags over the counter. "Particularly in the Flint Hills, but also in the Red Hills and other grassland areas in the state, we've had a lot of out-of-state hunters come in," Popelka said. Those hunters often try to convert the native prairie into brush and wooded terrain to create wildlife habitat.

"While the land is their property and they can do what they want, we have a deer tag in Kansas that is providing a perverse incentive for folks to buy land," he said. The conversion of that land into hunting habitat removes it from production agriculture and has opened the door for noxious weed invasion and woody encroachment. The KLA hopes to eliminate the non-resident landowner tag and require all non-resident licenses to be issued through the draw.

## Federal Focus

At the Federal level, Popelka said the Farm Bill and the Tax Cuts and Jobs Act of 2017 (TCJA) are both expiring in 2025 and will need to be renewed or extended to avoid serious financial setbacks.

"A good Farm Bill mostly leaves cattle producers out," Popelka said. He hopes there will be minimal provisions to discuss, which will help a quicker passage due to budget interests.

Looking at the TCJA, Popelka said the top priorities are extending provisions on the death tax exemption, limiting tax rate increases and continuing bonus depreciation on taxes.

"By the end of this year, if we don't extend the provisions on the death tax, the exemption will basically be cut in half. Right now it's around 13 million and it will drop to around 7 million dollars," he said. "We would love to repeal it because we think it's a bad policy, but we need to at least extend those current exemption levels."

With an animal vaccine bank for Foot & Mouth Disease (FMD) in Kansas, KLA also supports continued funding for the USDA to research methods to control the spread of emerging diseases.

Additionally, they are asking for Congress to intervene and fix the implications that California's

Proposition 12 has had on interstate commerce. The Proposition not only banned gestation, veal and laying hen crates in the state, but also banned importation of products from out-of-state sellers who used those management practices.

"We're asking Congress to do one of the things that is expressly stated in the Constitution in the Commerce Clause, which gives Congress the ability to regulate commerce among states," Popelka said. "This is squarely within Congress' jurisdiction and we want them to fix it." A law from Congress would nullify the law as it pertains to interstate commerce.

The final issue that KLA is focused on, and has industry support from the United States Cattlemen's Association (USCA), is the new dietary guidelines. USCA Director of Policy & Public Affairs, Kalina Reini, said the current dietary standards are up for renewal in 2026, but there is consideration to remove red meat. Reini said the concern lies with salt usage, as proponents of the change would like to replace beef with beans and lentils.



*Kalina Reini serves as the Director of Policy & Public Affairs for the USCA*

"It's odd that beef is on the chopping block," she said. "I can see how they would want to adjust the portions and amounts, but that's why we're surprised that they are not considering it a healthy food."

KLA and USCA hope to keep red meat within the guidelines to ensure it's a part of school lunch diets and family meals.

The top priorities for the USCA includes animal disease traceability, alternative protein labeling, trade guidelines and transportation regulations.

With the recent mandatory animal ID passage, the USCA hopes to make



sure data is protected and producers are educated. Although not a supporter of the new law, the USCA is working to help its producers be prepared for the requirements of tagging animals for interstate travel. Reini said she realizes why the federal government wants to implement a higher level of disease traceability, but also said producers feel the current system is sufficient for tracking outbreaks.

Recent rulings against labeling plant-based foods as “fake meat” have opened the door to labeling them as alternative proteins. The Food & Drug Administration released a draft guideline on the appropriate verbiage for labeling, which the USCA did not support. “It’s just a name, but that marketing piece is really important to our producers,” Reini said. She hopes they can get clarity around the guidelines and find a common ground that beef producers and plant-based food supporters can both agree on.

“It will require us to push and advocate, but people are open to keeping the distinction between the two,” Reini said. “Consumers want truth in labeling. They want to know if a burger is truly beef.” In discussing trade and transportation with legislators, Reini said



USCA is focused on proactive decisions. “Trade is really big for our producers,” she said. In addition to discussing items like Country of Origin Labeling, Reini said they will be watching for retaliatory tariffs based on President Trump’s policies.

“In the last Trump administration, we saw some producers hurt by the tariffs, but there was also compensation for those producers in the way of a relief package,” she said. “Because of that we’re a little less concerned because we know the government intends to be more fiscally conservative this presidential cycle.”

The focus of transportation policies will impact animal welfare for cattle hauled from feedlots to packing facilities. “There’s a lot of laws hindering our folks in the trucking industry,” she said. From delayed deliveries to speed limit rules and hauling requirements, many current regulations do not consider animal welfare and the need to quickly transport cattle over long distances. “We are looking for ways to improve the distribution system and get exemption for the agriculture industry,” Reini said.

## Making a Personal Investment

Across the board, Popelka and Reini are positive about this year’s legislative session. They both acknowledge that some issues will require more work and cooperation across party lines than others. But they believe each issue they are focused on has common sense roots that will lead to positive conversations.



Still, both organizations are limited to how much they can accomplish through their relationships with legislators. And that’s where producer participation becomes key.


“When I go in to speak with a legislator, if I don’t have an example in my pocket of how the issue affects a producer, I’m just a voice,” Reini said. That’s why she encourages producers to engage in the legislative process themselves. “Start getting involved by joining state or national groups and talk with your representatives at the federal level,” she said.

Popelka said producers benefit from being a member of an association because they have lobbyists that represent them every day at the capitol. “By participating in policy making procedures, you tell us what to do,” he said. But the result of lobbying is only effective when it’s combined with personal communication and relationships with cattle producers themselves.

“If we’re good at our jobs as lobbyists, we build a reputation as a resource. But at the end of the day, what moves a legislator is a voter,” Popelka said. “If something bad happens or we’re trying to make something good happen, it’s important to have that relationship.”

He admitted that many producers don’t have time to make regular phone calls or visits to their capitol. But he encouraged cattlemen and women to take one or two days each year to visit with their representatives and talk about the things that impact them.

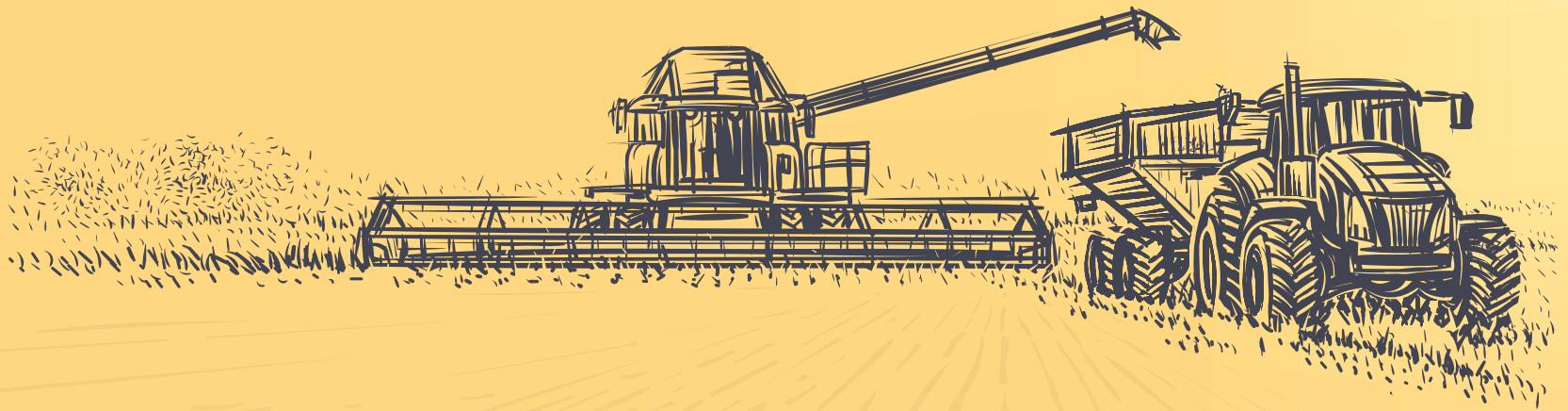
Reini said sometimes daily phone calls to complain are enough to draw attention to certain issues. “They need to hear about the issues to correlate the need for a solution,” she said.

“Find an organization where you grab most of what they do. Make sure you’re investing in one that puts in the time and actually does things,” Popelka said. Producers interested in joining the KLA or USCA can find more information at [www.kla.org](http://www.kla.org) or [www.uscattlemen.org](http://www.uscattlemen.org). 

*Editor’s Note: To hear the full interviews and learn more about 2025 policy priorities affecting the beef industry, visit [www.midwestcattleman.com](http://www.midwestcattleman.com).*



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# NEW SUPPORT FOR GRAZIERS

## NRCS launches financial assistance for virtual fencing

By Morning Ag Clips

The Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS), a division of the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA), will now fund Virtual Fencing (VF) projects for producers. VF is a precision livestock management tool that creates an enclosure, barrier, or boundary without a physical fence. VF allows real-time automation of grazing management from a smartphone or computer. Livestock are fit with a collar that generates audio warnings and electrical stimuli. Already used in Europe, New Zealand, and Australia for many years, VF rollout is currently underway in the United States. Several domestic vendors recently completed pilot projects and have begun supplying VF to United States producers.

VF is an exciting development that can open up opportunities for the adoption of regenerative grazing and diversification for producers. VF has potential to support many management scenarios including rotational grazing, vegetation management, cover crop grazing, silvopasture, and solar grazing. Adam Ledvina, a pilot VF farmer in Iowa, describes his experience using VF for his goat grazing operation: "It's a huge stress relief to have a VF system allowing me to keep an eye on my herds and rotate pastures across the many sites my goats graze."

NRCS programs provide financial assistance and technical assistance for producers interested in implementing conservation practices on their farms. In anticipation of the domestic availability of VF technology, NRCS implemented new payment scenarios to support producers in purchasing VF equipment, establishing grazing plans, and implementing VF.

According to Jeff Mathias, State Grassland Specialist with Iowa NRCS, "Virtual Fence will allow our producers to graze more efficiently. Using virtual fence will allow producers that are grazing crop residues, cover crops or stockpiled forages the ability to allocate small amounts every day or two. This can be accomplished with temporary electric fence but will be simplified with virtual fence. Virtual fence can help maintain forage quantity and quality by limiting trampling. I am excited to see virtual fence incorporated into bale grazing as well."

Interested producers are encouraged to contact their local USDA service office as soon as possible. Our understanding is that the first round applications may be due by the end of November, with approved contracts funded in March 2025. Please confirm with your



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local NRCS/FSA office.

In partnership with NRCS, Green Lands Blue Waters (GLBW) developed a set of materials providing an introduction to VF for NRCS field staff, grazing educators, and other conservation agriculture professionals. Consisting of a slide presentation, a pre-recorded webinar, 1-page fact sheet and FAQ document, these materials are free to use and cover VF Basics including:

- Virtual fence technical basics (how it works)
- Virtual fence effectiveness
- Opportunities and challenges
- Vendors in the US
- Costs
- Considerations for grazing plans
- NRCS financial support

As this technology continues to develop, the materials will be updated to reflect the most current information.

### **About Green Lands Blue Waters (GLBW)**

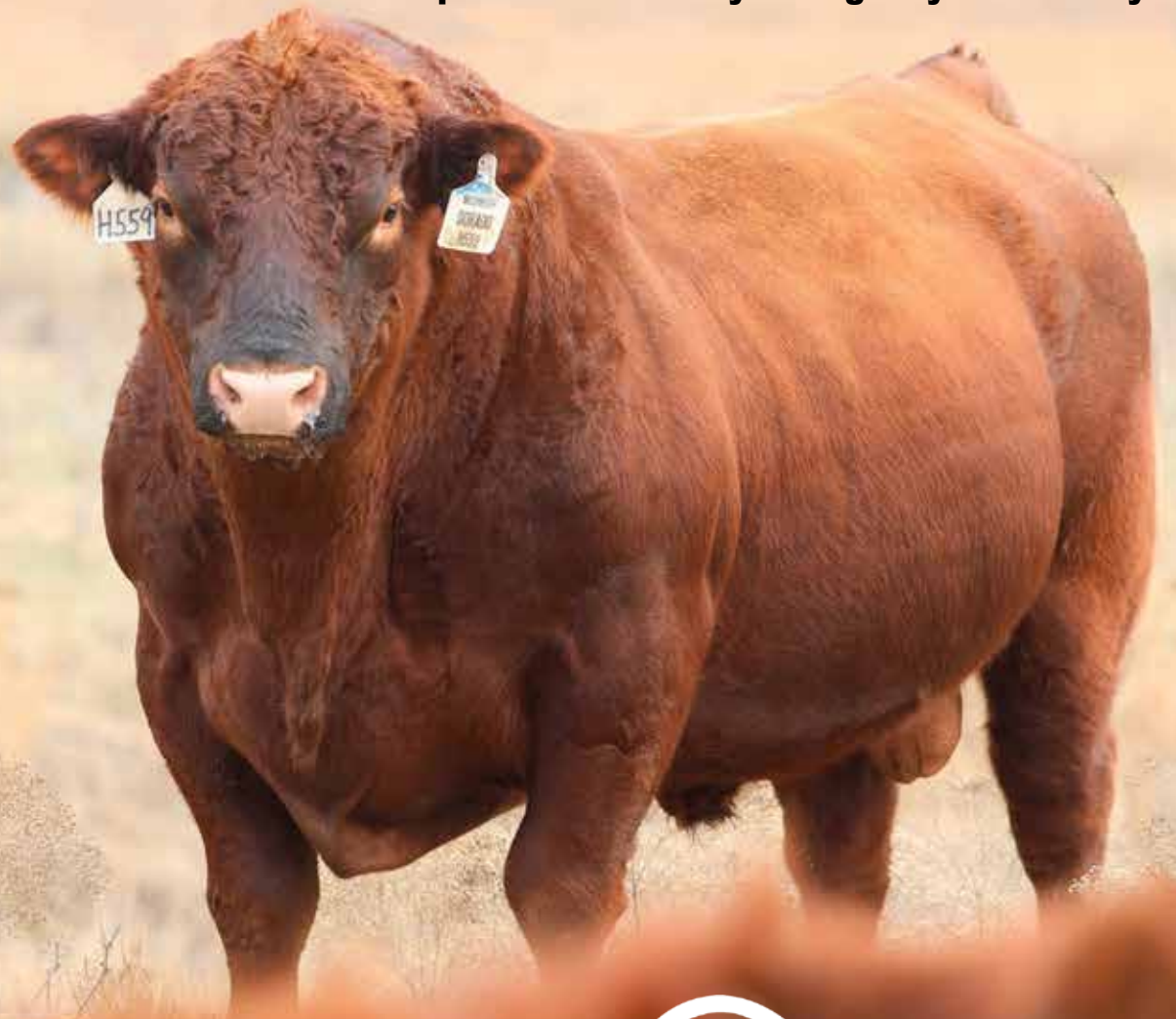
Green Lands Blue Waters (GLBW) is a vision for profitable agriculture based on keeping the soil covered productively year-round: farming with Continuous Living Cover. GLBW collaborates with a broad range of partners – universities, researchers, educators, producer associations, environmental groups, businesses, nonprofits, governmental agencies, and practitioners – and acts as a connector, collaborator, convener, and communicator serving multiple partners. Learn more at <https://greenlandsbluwaters.org/> 



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# UPCOMING CONFERENCES

## SW MO Spring Forage Conference & Central MO Forage & Beef Conference

Source: University of Missouri Extension

### Southwest Missouri Spring Forage Conference

STOCKTON, MO – The Southwest Missouri Spring Forage Conference is Tuesday, Feb. 25, at the Oasis Hotel and Convention Center, 2546 N. Glenstone Ave., Springfield.

“Keynote presenter Dr. Gary Bates, department head of Plant Science at University of Tennessee, will address the conference on ‘Looking Back at Advancements in Forage Production’ from his numerous years of research, extension and educational experience,” says Patrick Davis, University of Missouri Extension livestock field specialist.

Before his current job, Bates was the director of the University of Tennessee Beef and Forage Center for 12 years and a forage extension specialist for almost 30 years. His research and educational program during this time focused on forage management to improve the economic, environmental and social sustainability of livestock production. In addition to Bates’s keynote presentation, Davis urges conference attendees to listen to his second talk following lunch, titled “Steps to Successful Forage Establishment,” which covers advances in seeding technology.

“For further education, conference participants can attend several breakout sessions,” says Davis. Breakout session topics include grazing cover crops, annuals for forages, sunn hemp, soil fertility, native warm-season grass establishment, fescue toxicosis and counteracting it with forage legumes, matching beef cows to their environment, experience from the frontlines of custom grazing, managing mineral nutrition in beef cattle, flexible stocking rates for profitability, and livestock safety tips for warm-season grasses.

“This conference also provides educational sessions specific to sheep and goat producers,” says Davis. These session topics include forage for sheep and goats, solar grazing and market outlook. In addition, a panel of speakers will discuss getting paid to graze sheep and goats.

“A trade show is held in conjunction with the conference,” says Davis. Agricultural businesses and organizations will have exhibits and representatives available to discuss their products and services. If interested in becoming an exhibitor or sponsor, contact Jody Wade at the Webster County Soil and Water Conservation District office at 417-468-4176, Ext. 3, or [jody.wade@swcd.mo.gov](mailto:jody.wade@swcd.mo.gov).

Conference check-in begins at 8 a.m., with sessions running from 8:45 a.m. to 3:30 p.m. A banquet luncheon is included with the registration. The cost is \$55 per person. To attend, register by Feb. 13 at [www.springforageconference.com](http://www.springforageconference.com). Walk-in registrations are not allowed.

For additional questions, contact Jody Wade at the Webster County Soil and Water Conservation District office at 417-468-4176, Ext. 3, or [jody.wade@swcd.mo.gov](mailto:jody.wade@swcd.mo.gov).

### Central Missouri Forage & Beef Conference

VIENNA, MO – The Central Missouri Forage & Beef Conference will be taking place on Friday, February 28 in Vienna, MO. The conference will be held at the Knights of Columbus Hall, 206 6th St., Vienna, MO. There is a \$15 charge for this conference and includes dinner. Pre-registration is required by Tuesday, February 20.

“Drought has been plaguing producers for two years now and many pastures have forage stands that are depleted,” said Chrisee Brandl, MU Extension Livestock Specialist. The conference serves to provide timely information on beef production relevant to central and southern Missouri and network with fellow beef producers. Rachel Hopkins, Ag Business Specialist stated that many producers are wondering what the cattle market is going to do in 2025. “One of the most popular topics each year is the market outlook, and I don’t expect that to change this year,” said Rachel.

Attendees will have several opportunities to visit with the vendors at the trade show also. Speakers will cover topics including the beef market outlook, financial planning for planting natives, tick diseases in cattle, small ruminants grazing in beef operations and grazing annuals/drought preparation. There will be the popular producer panel with insights from area producers that have found different ways to recover from the impacts of drought. “I hope the conference will provide farmers with the information they need to weather the ever-changing ag environment.” Chrisee concluded.

To register, contact the Maries County SWCD Office at 573-422-3342 or visit <https://extension.missouri.edu/events/central-missouri-forage-beef-conference-0>. Contact Amy Neier at the Maries County SWCD Office at 573-422-3342 if you have questions. 🐄

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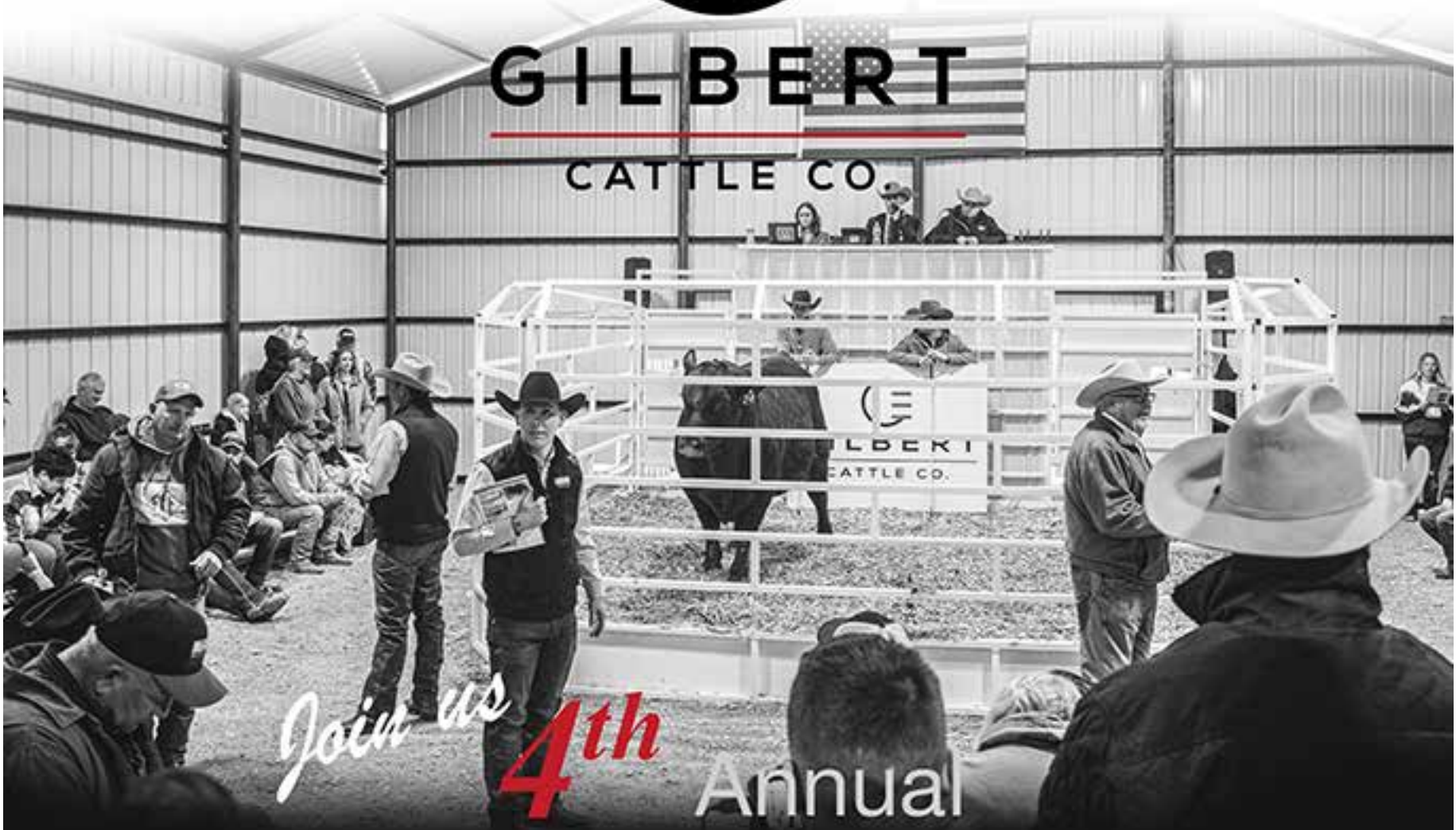
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# BREEDER PROFILE:

# GRANZOW HEREFORDS

By Brenda Black | Photos courtesy of Granzow Herefords



## **Q: How did your operation get started and where are you located?**

For 24 years, Tom Granzow built his herd while managing the Kansas Hereford Association, stepping down from the position last year.

"My son Tobyn would be the 5th generation of Granzows raising cattle, mostly Herefords, on the western edge of the Flint Hills," Granzow said. "My brother and I, and two cousins are still on the original land."

The Granzows raised commercial Herefords for many years prior to owning registered cattle in 1975. In 1996, Granzow and his wife Mary started their own operation, Granzow Herefords, LLC., which is now owned in partnership with their son Tobyn and daughter Toniann Richard.

"Both of my children are very good people and they've always shown an interest in the ranch. Even my daughter, who lives in Oak Grove, Missouri, and has her own career as CEO of a healthcare coalition," Granzow said.

## **Q: When and how do you market cattle from your ranch each year?**

Granzow Herefords has sold the high selling lot in many select Hereford sales. But their best success has come through private treaty transactions. "If I put an ad in the local paper, I will sell every female we have for sale" Granzow said.

He's sold bulls throughout Kansas and has customers in Arkansas, Wisconsin, Texas, Oklahoma, South Dakota and Missouri.

## **Q: What is one unique way you serve your customers?**

"We stand behind our cattle," Granzow said. "I'd rather replace bulls than offer credits, so our customers don't feel forced to buy again. In 20 years, I've only had to replace two."

In addition to exhaustive feedlot and carcass testing on steers and heifers, Granzow Herefords has done residual feed testing through the Green Springs Bull Test in Nevada, Missouri, and tested females through the University of Missouri RFI. "We finish everything out, keep replacement heifers and feed the rest. Our cattle grade 85% Choice and Prime. We're competing right at the yard average on gain and the cost is under, and we get premiums on the carcass," Granzow said.

The carcass data is secondary to the maternal emphasis, though. "That's the reason we went with Line One cattle. They are good, clear across the board on everything," Granzow said.

"We do not chase fads and only strive to raise the very best cattle we can and put that in a package that will keep our customer in the beef business for generations," he said.

## **Q: What management strategies have provided the greatest benefit to your operation and why?**

"Tobyn is my best management tool," Granzow said. "I am blessed to have a son willing to carry on the operation. Tobyn is very involved in the management. He has been since he was nine years old. And he's a better thinker than I am."

The father-son duo partner on all aspects of the cattle operation and operate First Choice Meats, Inc. in Herington, Kansas, where they



process their cattle and sell all-natural beef direct to consumer.

"To us, this is the greatest test of the quality of our product," Granzow said.

Daughter Toniann is helping to accelerate sales to customers where she lives. "That's why we bought [First Choice Meats]," Granzow said, "to diversify so that we can capture full value from birth until it's on somebody's plate."

Granzow is quick to credit Mary, his business-minded wife of 50 years, for her role in their success. "My biggest management practice is family," he said. "Our best management is each other. We trust each other and we know everything is getting done."

**Q: If your ranch could be known for one thing, what would you want it to be and why?**

Integrity is the most important aspect of Granzow's ranching operation. "Quality will take care of itself and we stand behind what we do."

The foundation of that quality is found in the Granzow Hereford mission statement: "A complete breeding program...raising practical, functional cattle with a common sense approach."

**Q: What new innovations or opportunities are you looking to pursue for your operation in the next 1-3 years?**

"If you are in production agriculture and you have not been sustainable, then you are not in business anymore," Granzow said, "You have to be on top of things to even have a chance. The Hereford's hardiness, adaptability, and performance are reasons we chose the breed to begin with."

To that end, the Granzows are always modifying their business to hedge against unfair price hits because the hide is red...and white.

"We know what our Herefords will do in the feedlot and on the rail," Granzow said. "Tobyn and I decided to feed out and make a commitment to do it. With the way expenses are going, now we have to figure out how to do more volume." 🐄

*Editor's Note: To hear the full interview and learn more about Granzow Herefords, visit [www.midwestcattleman.com](http://www.midwestcattleman.com).*

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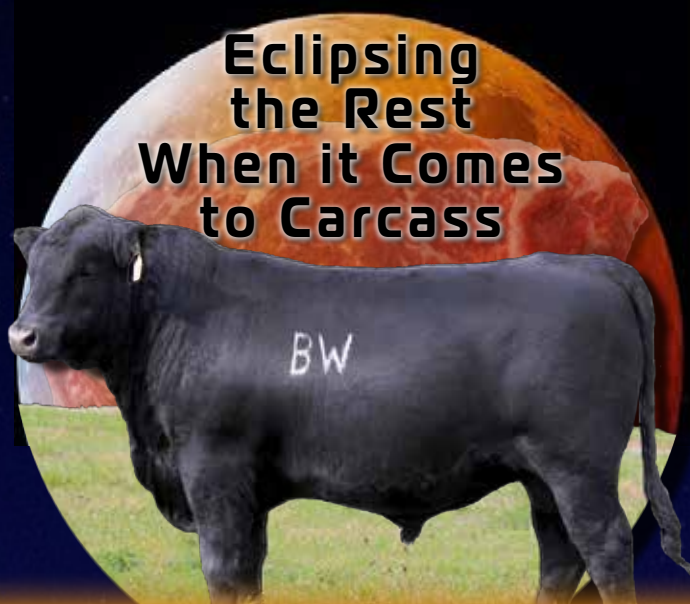
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# LONG-DAY FEED EFFICIENCY

## Hereford genetics add marketing flexibility

By Wes Ishmael, American Hereford Association

**F**eeding cattle to maximize economic return is a constant game of antagonistic tradeoffs, such as grid premiums for quality grade versus grid discounts for yield grade and too-heavy carcasses, cost of gain versus total pounds gained and all the rest.

Along the way, Lee Mayo, partner and general manager of HRC Feed Yards LLC, Scott City, Kan., says feedlots typically want to maximize economic returns while finishing cattle as quickly as possible to minimize the cost of gain, which is a key driver of cattle feeding returns.

Generally speaking, the longer cattle are fed past an optimum point, the more feed efficiency suffers and the more the cost of gain increases. This reality garnered more focus last year as cheaper feed prices, high fed cattle prices, declining cattle numbers, historically high purchase prices of feeder cattle and economics surrounding feedlot capacity utilization encouraged feeding cattle for significantly more days.

### Extended efficiency magnifies returns

“Understanding differences in feed efficiency as days on feed increase is probably something we’ve not paid as much attention to as needed, as an industry” Mayo says. He shares Central Plains benchmarks and data from a pen of commingled steers from the American Hereford

Association Feedout Programs (see Hereford Feedout Programs Grow) to illustrate his point.

Mayo looked at a pen of commingled steers HRC fed through the winter of 2024 (H24), which included 161 steers from 13 different owners. The pen was mainly straightbred Hereford steers sprinkled with Hereford-sired red and black baldies. They were harvested late last summer.

Compared to a similar pen fed and harvested during the same period a year earlier, the H24 group was fed 41 more days (223 days), yet pounds of feed per pound gain increased by only 0.09 pounds to 5.59 pounds, which was still 0.76 pounds more efficient than the Central Plains average (see Table 1).

	2023	2024
Head	161	161
In Weight	720	666
Terminal Re-implant Wt.	1,239	1,174
Out Weight	1,423	1,476
Dressing %	64.94%	63.90%
DOF	182	223
ADG	3.88	3.66
% Deaths	1.86%	0.62%
% Choice	78%	77%
% Prime	0%	6%
% PR/CH	78%	83%
% YG 1/2	37%	19%
% YG 4/5	22%	46%
HCW	924	943
Yield Grade	2.8	3.3
BF	0.72	0.80
REA	15.1	14.2
MARB	455	493
\$/Head	\$2,626.71	\$2,831.81
\$/CWT	\$284.10	\$300.27
F:G (DM)	5.50	5.59
F:G (DM) – Central Plains Avg.	6.32	6.35
Difference	0.82	0.76

Table 1: Comingled Steers

### Standard Equipment

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"We've always known Hereford cattle are more feed efficient than other breeds, but I never dreamed in a million years that if we fed them another 41 days, we would only impact feed efficiency by .09 pounds of gain," Mayo says.

Besides its impact on the bottom line, Mayo explains customers use cost of gain as a key comparative metric between cattle feeding organizations.

"Ninety percent of the people I feed cattle for feed cattle every day and receive closeouts every week. The one thing they complain most about is cost of gain," Mayo says. "I'm in competition with every other feedyard in the country on cost of gain."

Efficiently adding more total pounds drove revenue significantly higher.

Compared to the similar pen in 2023, HRC added an average of 107 pounds per head to the H24 pen for a total added feed cost of \$99.21 per head, which resulted in an additional \$197.95 more per head in carcass value. The net added value due to carcass weight was \$98.74 per head (added carcass weight value minus added feed cost).

The comparison reflects averaging feed costs on a dry matter basis across the two years. Cost of gain for the H24 pen was 83.9 cents per pound, only 1.4 cents per pound more than the pen fed in 2023.

"Increased feed efficiency makes money for cattle feeders," Mayo says. "And, I'm not a fan of buzzwords, but when you look at it, feed efficiency is sustainability. There are fewer acres and more people every day. If cattle can gain a pound with 5.5 pounds of feed instead of 6.5 pounds, it's huge."

Plus, 5% more of the H24 pen graded Choice and Prime, resulting in an additional \$16.49 per head across the entire pen. As with feed cost, Mayo averaged the fed cattle price, along with carcass premiums and discounts across both years to calculate the difference. All told, the H24 pen generated \$115.23 per head more than similar steers the previous year. See All Choice and Prime for another example of Hereford carcass quality performance.

Association (AHA) National Reference Sire Program (NRSP) underscore the breed's significant improvement in carcass quality while maintaining the breed's maternal superiority and production efficiency.

Olsen Ranches, Harrisburg, Neb., the mainstay NRSP herd, randomly mated their commercial Hereford cow herd via one-time AI to 14 different NRSP Hereford sires. The resulting 300 head of steers, born June-July 2022, were ultimately harvested in February 2024 (six weeks later than normal due to weather).

The steers graded 51.1% Prime with the remainder grading Choice, predominantly in the upper two-thirds of Choice, and posted an average yield grade of 3.6. Among other performance metrics for the pen: 4.3 pounds average daily gain; 26.2 pounds daily dry matter

Continued on Page 37

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# FIGHTING PARASITIC DISEASE

## KSVDL Urges Vigilance For Emerging Cattle Parasite

By Kansas Livestock Association

**T**he Kansas State Veterinary Diagnostic Laboratory (KSVDL) wants livestock producers to be aware of a new red blood cell parasite, *Theileria orientalis* Ikeda, that has been found in calves imported to Kansas. The parasite causes theileriosis, which leads to anemia and other serious health issues in cattle. According to Gregg Hanzlicek, KSVDL associate director and professor of diagnostic medicine and pathobiology, it has been present in the eastern U.S. for some time, but first was diagnosed in Kansas after affected calves were imported from the east for feeding in December 2024.

The disease primarily is spread through multi-use needles and insects, with the Asian longhorned tick identified as the primary vector. This tick, although not yet found in Kansas, has been detected in Missouri, Arkansas and a county in northeastern Oklahoma bordering Labette County. Blood-feeding flies such as horse, stable and deer flies (not horn flies) also are believed to be able to transmit the disease, said Hanzlicek.

The intracellular parasite destroys red blood cells, resulting in anemia, weakness, lethargy, yellowing of the mucous membranes, difficulty breathing, late-term abortions and, in severe cases, death. Reported death rates range from very low to 30% or higher.

All ages of cattle can become infected and show clinical signs. The disease cannot be spread through respiratory aerosols, breeding, reproductive fluids, etc. Multiple-use needles, including those used for injections, tattoos and ear tags, are the major ways this disease is spread within a herd.

According to Hanzlicek, the parasite is highly resistant to antibiotics available in the U.S. Therefore, testing all animals originating east of Kansas before importation is key to not bringing the disease into the state. There is a blood test available at KSVDL that will identify carrier animals. If a producer is importing a large number of head, Hanzlicek said testing a subset would be appropriate for determining if the parasite is present in the group.

To avoid spreading the disease within a herd, producers should use normal infection prevention procedures such as single needle use and cleaning and disinfecting tattoo and ear tag pliers. Additionally, it's important to implement an appropriate fly, tick and lice control regimen.

More information at [ksvdl.org](http://ksvdl.org) and [Youtube.com/@KStateVDL](https://www.youtube.com/@KStateVDL). 🐄

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Continued from Page 35... Feed Efficiency intake; 6:1 feed conversion; 858-pound carcass weight; average ribeye size of 13.8 square inches.

For proper context, the Olsens employ a low-input philosophy. Calves are born June-July, weaned October-November and then roughed on winter pastures with little to no feed supplement until the feeding trial in June. Likewise, cows receive no supplement except during extreme weather conditions.

With low inputs in mind, the Olsens emphasize feed efficiency, place downward genetic selection pressure on mature cow size and milk, and use sires that are breed average for growth but above breed average for calving ease. Among sires that fit these criteria, they select for as much end-product merit as is available. In 1999, steers from the program averaged high Select/low Choice. These most recent steers averaged high Choice/low Prime.

### Hereford Feedout Programs Grow

More Hereford breeders and commercial users of Hereford genetics are learning how their genetics perform in the feedlot and on the rail through the American Hereford Association (AHA) Feedout Programs. Last year, 103 participants from 23 states sent 2,379 Hereford and Hereford-influenced calves to feed at HRC Feed Yards LLC in Scott City, Kan.

"The value of this information and being closely engaged with the cattle feeding sector has always been important. It is becoming invaluable as more cattle are channeled into specification-based, value-added areas of the supply chain," explains Trey Befort, AHA director of commercial programs. "By learning their herd's genetic potential and understanding what performance traits cattle feeders and beef packers find the most valuable, producers can build a more effective marketing plan to make sounder marketing decisions year after year."

The experience also informs production decisions.

"We needed to find a way to make sure our genetics were doing what they're supposed to be doing. What better way to do that than to take calves that you're raising

at home and send them to the feedlot," says Denise Loyning of L Bar W Cattle Co., Absarokee, Montana. "Let's get back carcass data. Let's find out if our health protocols at home are working. Are the bulls that we're selecting right for what the industry is needing today? Are those carcass bulls truly performing? Are all those things coming together?"

Last year was the third year L Bar W Cattle Co. sent calves to the feedout.

"Every year, we see increased interest in these programs from our members and their customers because of the value they find in benchmarking feedlot and carcass performance in their programs and then tracking subsequent performance relative to their benchmark," Befort says. 🐮

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40.5%	48.1%	35.3%	34.5%	50.8%	42.5%	57%

<b>CW</b> 43.83	<b>REA</b> 0.58	<b>MB</b> .32	<b>\$COW</b> 98.6	<b>FPI</b> 83.83	<b>EPI</b> 120.9
31.4%	39%	47%	59.1%	39.2%	41.5%



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12	2.2	80	124	18	0.33


Lot 30

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<b>CED</b>	<b>BW</b>	<b>WW</b>	<b>YW</b>	<b>MILK</b>	<b>MARB.</b>
14	0.3	84	128	21	0.07


Lot 131

**CRAFTSMAN X 82F**  
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<b>CED</b>	<b>BW</b>	<b>WW</b>	<b>YW</b>	<b>MILK</b>	<b>MARB.</b>
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# IS STARTING AN **AGRITOURISM BUSINESS** RIGHT FOR YOUR FARM?

## Evaluating the pro's and con's of diversification

By Farm Bureau Financial Services

**A**griculture tourism, sometimes called agritourism, can be an immensely rewarding way for farm and ranch owners to extend their reach into their community and build their business.

Agritourism involves any kind of agricultural activity that brings members of the public to the farm or ranch for education, recreation or retail. It's a way that people in the agriculture industry can diversify their revenue stream, connect with others and spread awareness about agriculture broadly and their business specifically. Sounds great, right?

But starting an agritourism business requires careful planning and forethought. As you consider whether starting an agritourism business is right for your ag operation, here are some things to keep in mind.

### Types of Agritourism

There are a variety of agritourism farm activities. The right fit for you depends in part on your community, your land and buildings and your capacity to invest time and money, as well as the kinds of activities that draw people to your region.

Here are some agritourism examples that might be worth considering:

- Fishing
- Hunting
- Horseback riding
- Farm tours
- Cooking classes
- Wine tasting
- Harvest festivals
- Barn dances
- Market goods
- Farm stays
- U-pick operations (such as blueberries, apples or pumpkins)
- Christmas tree farms
- Corn mazes
- Sleigh rides
- UTV rides
- Nursery tours
- Exotic animal farms
- Dog training

Agritourism can be lucrative and may work in seasonal cycles. Some of the top agritourism enterprises bring in large groups of people for specific events or celebrations at particular times of year. These activities can build a bridge between the farmer and the community. They not only show people what the farm does, but they also allow people who otherwise might not interact with farm animals and crops to get hands-on experience with some aspect of the agricultural

business, such as helping with a cattle drive, learning to milk a cow or picking apples. They can also create memories that last a lifetime.

### Pros of Creating an Agritourism Business

Of course, the main appeal of adding agritourism to your ag operation is increasing revenue (or at least your potential for revenue). You are also adding a different revenue stream, which helps diversify and reduce risk to your business.

For example, if you rely primarily on row crops as a revenue source, your revenue can be increased into the fall by having a corn maze. If your livestock have a difficult year, you can still host a wedding or other event, bringing in revenue and contributing to someone's special day. Adding an agritourism opportunity can also increase your main revenue source.

For instance, bringing people in for cooking classes can help you sell more meat, eggs or produce to those customers when they visit your farm. You're making a connection with people who appreciate what you do and how you do it — and people who love "farm to table" cuisine might become loyal customers.

An agritourism business also has the capacity to benefit your community. Employment opportunities and out-of-town visitors can have a positive economic impact on your local economy, bringing people not just to your business but to others in the region. You can even build relationships with other local businesses, multiplying your efforts.

Adding an agritourism business can also benefit the natural world. Some agritourism activities, such as fishing, hunting and birdwatching, rely on a healthy environment for wildlife. That requires actively managing the land and making conservation choices to benefit wildlife. And that benefits us all.

### Cons of Creating an Agritourism Business

Agritourism can be rewarding, but it can also be a risk, and that needs to be managed. A potentially significant struggle for an agritourism business is dealing with the visitors who come onto the property — which of course can involve liability, especially if there's a large number of guests. You'll want to ensure that not only is your agritourism business adequately covered, but also that your primary ag business is protected.

As you know, starting a new venture always includes some risk. There is a chance that the agritourism business will struggle and maybe even fail. You could lose some or all of the money you invested to get it off the ground. A disaster could multiply your risk, especially if you don't carry an adequate insurance policy.

Plus, running a business can be demanding — there is a possibility that your agritourism business can pull time and resources away from your core ag business, making you feel stretched in too many directions.

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You may find yourself unable to meet all the needs of both businesses in addition to the commitments in your personal life. It's important to care not just for your physical health but your mental health, too.

### What to Consider

First, ask yourself an important question: What do you want to accomplish by starting an agritourism business? What is your goal, and who is your target customer? Having a defined set of goals is the foundation of your agritourism business plan.

The second question is related: Can you make this happen? The answer to this requires significant thought and research. Consider conducting the strategic plan often called a "SWOT" analysis.

**Strengths:** What do you already have in your ag operation that can make you successful? This could be knowledge of local plants, a recipe book of tried-and-true favorites, beautiful land or any number of other positive traits and assets.

**Weaknesses:** What do you lack that can keep you from reaching your goals? For example, your location could be too far away from other amenities to attract visitors, or you have too many other monetary commitments or inadequate facilities to host large groups of people. Or perhaps there's a lot of competition already in your area for that activity or market.

**Opportunities:** Which external factors can help you succeed? Perhaps your town has an annual harvest festival that draws crowds, and a barn dance at your property could tap into that audience. Maybe the local middle school has a focus on agriculture and can organize field trips to your operation.

**Threats:** Which external factors can hurt your business venture? For example, a lack of snow could derail your plans for sleigh rides, competitors could pose a challenge or increasing supply costs could make turning a profit on cooking classes difficult.

Lastly, consider the investments you'd need to make to get this business off the ground. How much money can you allocate to this business to get it started? Is that enough? Will you be in a tough

financial position if you never turn a profit? How much time can you invest? Will that be enough to keep the business going? Make sure you are realistic with yourself in determining if you should move forward at this point in time. Remember, your idea could be a good one, but if the timing isn't right, it may be better to keep working on your plans and jump in at a later date.

### Set Yourself Up for Success

Once the decision is made, you'll need to begin working on a business plan and getting all your ducks in a row, including taking a variety of legal and liability actions to prepare. A meeting with a Farm Bureau Financial Services agent or financial advisor can help you get off to a strong start. 🐄

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# FARM SCHOOL

## 'Farm School' in Harrisonville helps kids connect to farming, nature

By Grant Stephens, KSHB News

The back to school rush is in full swing all over the metro, but just south of Kansas City a very different kind of school for young kids is wrapping up the first week of its fourth year.

It's called Farm School out at the Red Barn Ranch south of Kansas City, and it's part of one family's effort to keep telling the story of the American farmer.

"All of those skills that the kids are needed to learn as preschoolers are learned but it's authentic learning," said Leslie Culpepper, who came up with the idea of Farm School with her cousin Matt Moreland.

"It's learning as they're playing and as they're feeding the animals. It's not just sitting down at a desk."

Culpepper is a former Harrisonville teacher with a passion both for education, and the farm life she grew up with.

"The whole idea behind farm school is getting kids out of their house,



Photo Grant Stephens

off technology and back to the country, back to the farm. Knowing where food comes from. Knowing how crops grow," she said.

"We do have a small classroom time where we do read-aloud and we talk about a certain topic, but most of our learning and most of our skills are learned outside."

It's sort of like a preschool outdoors, where kids come learn a few times a week. For example, instead of counting wooden blocks, they'd count chicken eggs.

Culpepper says it's real, experiential learning.

The farm part of the farm school is where Moreland comes in. He's a farmer out at the Red Barn Ranch where the school is located.

"In the world we live in today, people are further and further removed from agriculture. It's not their fault they didn't grow up on a farm, but their mom and dad didn't, their grandparents didn't, so they don't have anybody to talk to," he said.

"They're so attentive, they want to know what's going on, they're curious, they want to learn."

The school currently has a wait list of over 300 students, but Moreland and Culpepper hope to expand the school soon to allow more kids to enroll.



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# THE BENEFITS OF FROST SEEDING LEGUMES

By Victor Shelton, Retired NRCS Agronomist/Grazing Specialist

As I write this in late December, winter has definitely arrived. Snow flurries are falling outside my window, and while warmer than usual temperatures lingered longer than expected, true winter weather has finally settled in.

Recently, I've had several conversations about increasing legumes in pastures through frost seeding. This method offers numerous benefits for pasture health, soil fertility and forage quality. One key advantage is that legumes, like red and white clover, fix nitrogen in the soil, reducing the need for synthetic fertilizers and promoting a more balanced plant community. This results in more resilient and sustainable pastures.

Frost seeding also increases the nutritional value of the pasture. Legumes provide excellent forage for livestock, offering higher protein content than grasses, which improves animal growth, milk production and reproductive success. Additionally, frost seeding is cost-effective.

It requires minimal equipment and can be done between Christmas and Valentine's Day, eliminating the need for expensive planting equipment.

Beyond this, frost seeding improves soil structure. The deep root systems of legumes enhance aeration and water infiltration, improving drainage, reducing erosion and preventing soil compaction, especially

in pastures with heavy livestock traffic. The freeze-thaw cycles during winter create small cracks in the soil, allowing seeds to penetrate and ensuring good seed-to-soil contact for successful germination, even when traditional planting conditions aren't ideal.

Frost seeding can also reduce weed competition. By introducing legumes early, before weeds have a chance to establish, you can create a more competitive pasture mix. Legume seedlings can fill in bare spots and outcompete weeds, leading to healthier, more productive pastures.

Frost seeding mimics natural reseeding. It doesn't require perfect soil preparation or ideal moisture conditions, making it ideal for pastures where traditional seeding can be difficult. Snow or frost helps transport the seeds to the soil surface, where the freeze-thaw cycles ensure good seed placement. However, in milder winters, this action might not be quite as adequate, so it's best to wait for consistent cold weather before frost seeding.

Competition from existing vegetation is one of the biggest challenges with frost seeding. It's essential to graze the pasture down to 3 to 4 inches of

growth after the forage has gone dormant. This removes excess growth and allows seeds to reach the soil surface. Grazing closer to the soil also helps reduce early spring grass growth, giving legume seedlings a better chance to establish. In areas with thick grass, grazing before dormancy can set the grass back further and slow growth for spring establishment, if needed.

After seeding, avoid applying nitrogen in the spring, as it will encourage grass growth and reduce the chances of the legume seedlings surviving. Grazing stockpiled forages after over-seeding, like tall fescue, can actually help improve seed-to-soil contact, as long as conditions aren't overly wet, which could damage the pasture or bury the seed. Grazing weakens the



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grass stand, opening the sward and slowing early spring growth, which benefits the legume seedlings.

For frost seeding, I recommend higher seeding rates compared to conventional methods. White clover should be seeded at 1-1.5 lbs. per acre, red clover at 6-8 lbs. per acre, birdsfoot trefoil at 5 lbs. per acre, and common lespedeza (hulled seed) at 10 lbs. per acre. Mixing with other seeds can help with distribution. Fertilizer (without nitrogen) or pelletized lime can also be used.

Inoculating legumes with the appropriate rhizobia inoculants is crucial for proper bacterial activity, germination and growth. Coated seeds help address size, inoculants and even pH adjustments.

As spring arrives, continue grazing to control early grass growth and allow sunlight to reach the newly germinated legume seedlings. Keep grass growth in check through grazing or haying until the legumes are well-established. Just don't overgraze! Grazing the top third is ideal to keep grass growth in control.

In my experience, clovers and lespedezas tend to perform well when frost seeded. Trefoil, in particular though, requires excellent seed-to-soil contact and is sensitive to competition.

Flavonoids in red clover help reduce the negative effects of endophyte-infected tall fescue, protecting livestock from toxic alkaloids, improving liver function, and enhancing overall animal performance. Red clover can improve forage quality and support livestock health, especially if you plan to harvest hay. I generally don't recommend red clover for horse hay or for sheep grazing right before or during the breeding season.

White clover is better for grazing than hay because it's harder to dry. It does contribute significant nitrogen to the system but can have more risk of bloat – maintain it at no more than 30% of the forage mix and use bloat guard when needed.

All these legumes benefit from proper soil pH management. White and red clovers thrive in slightly acidic to neutral soils with an ideal pH range of 6.2 to 7.0, while annual lespedeza prefers slightly more acidic soil, typically in the range of 5.5 to 6.5. Birdsfoot trefoil also performs best in soils with a pH

of 6.0 to 7.0. Correct pH levels help rhizobia bacteria fix nitrogen effectively, which is essential for legume growth. Regular soil testing and pH adjustments with lime ensure optimal growth, yield and nitrogen fixation.

Successful frost seeding of legumes requires grazing the pasture down before seeding to reduce litter and competition, seeding during freeze-thaw conditions for better seed placement and managing early spring grass growth to allow seedlings to establish themselves.

Remember, the goal is not to maximize each grazing event, but to extend the grazing season and optimize pasture health. Keep on grazing! 🐄

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# DISHING IT UP!

By Laura Black

After our first daughter was born, a sweet church friend brought us a pot of cheeseburger soup, sweet rolls, and the best homemade peach and strawberry jelly. Not only did she bring us a meal, but she also shared

the recipe with us. This hearty soup has now become a staple on our dinner table each winter. It makes a large pot, but freezes well for those nights when you need a quick meal.



## Cheeseburger Soup

- |                             |                               |
|-----------------------------|-------------------------------|
| 2# ground beef, browned     | 8 cups diced potatoes         |
| 1 ½ cup shredded carrots    | ½ cup flour                   |
| 1 ½ cup diced celery        | 4 cups Velveeta cheese, cubed |
| 2 tsp. dried basil          | 3 cups milk                   |
| 2 tsp. dried parsley flakes | 1 ½ tsp. salt                 |
| ½ cup margarine             | 1 tsp. pepper                 |
| 6 cups chicken broth        | ½ cup sour cream              |

Sauté carrots, celery, basil and parsley in 2 Tbsp. margarine. Add broth, potatoes and beef. Bring to a boil, cover and simmer for 10-12 minutes. Melt remaining 6 Tbsp. margarine and add flour. Cook and stir 2 minutes. Reduce heat to low. Add cheese, milk, salt and pepper. Cook until cheese melts and add sour cream. Simmer for a few minutes.



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			YW	YH	SC	
			ACC %	ACC %	ACC %	
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+7	+2.9	+77	+138	+8	+1.87	+32
.45	.80	.73	.69	.75	.42	.38
45%	85%	20%	20%	20%	5%	15%
10	156	126	101	77	1	



**110 - Fall Bred  
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