



# Cattle Methodology and Quality Measures

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**Scope and Purpose:** The January Cattle Survey targets cattle and calf producers in the U.S. The January survey collects data for total cattle inventory and the components of that total, including beef cows, milk cows, bulls, replacement heifers, other heifers and steers, calves, and cattle on feed. In addition the January survey collects calf crop (calves born from the previous year), death loss from the previous year, slaughter for consumption, breeding animal values, and grazing fees data. Data are also collected for total cattle grazing on small grain pastures in Kansas, Oklahoma, and Texas. A federal program survey is conducted every five years for Cattle and Calf Predator and Non-Predator Loss and is incorporated as part of the January Cattle Survey.

**Survey Timeline:** The reference dates for the January Cattle Survey is January 1 with a data collection period of 15 days, beginning one day prior to the reference date. Regional Field Offices may begin data collection one day prior to the reference date. Data collection continues until a scheduled ending date and Regional Field Offices have 4 to 5 business days to complete editing and analysis, execute the summary, and interpret the survey results. The Agricultural Statistics Board (ASB) must perform the national review, reconcile state estimates to the national estimates, and prepare the official estimates for release in 5 to 6 business days. The estimates are released to the public on the last business day in January.

**Sampling:** For most states the target population for the January Cattle Survey is all agricultural establishments with one or more head of cattle on the land operated. A lower boundary, such as 20 head is used in a few states to establish the population. NASS uses a dual frame approach, consisting of list frame and area frame components to provide complete coverage of this target population. The January Cattle Survey is conducted in every state.

The list frame includes all known agricultural establishments. A profile, known as control data of each establishment is maintained on the list frame to allow NASS to define list frame sampling populations for specific surveys and to employ efficient sampling designs. Only list frame records with positive cattle control data are included in the list frame population for the cattle sample. The list frame cattle population covers approximately 88 percent of January cattle inventory in the U.S.

The area frame contains all land in the United States and as such, is complete. The land is stratified according to intensity of agriculture using satellite imagery. The land in each stratum is divided into segments of roughly one square mile. Segments are optimally allocated and sampled to effectively measure crops and livestock. The sampled segments are fully enumerated in June. All farms and ranches found operating tracts in these segments are checked to see if they are included in the list frame cattle population. The farms and ranches that are not included in the list frame cattle population, called nonoverlap tracts are sampled for the January Cattle survey so that the target population is completely represented. The area frame component of the January Cattle survey covers approximately 12 percent of the January cattle inventory in the U.S.

The January Cattle Survey list frame sample is selected using a hierarchical stratified sampling design with strata defined by total cattle and calves, milk cows, and cattle on feed. The sample is designed to achieve a U.S. standard error of 1 percent of the point estimate for total cattle and calves, 2 percent for milk cows, and 2 percent for cattle on feed. The U.S. list frame sample size for the January Cattle Survey in recent years is approximately 34,000. The January Cattle Survey nonoverlap sample is a subset of the June Area Survey. The sample (or subsample) uses a stratified sample design based on the cattle data collected from the June Area Survey. The area frame sample size is approximately 4,000. Each list frame and area frame sampling unit is assigned a sampling weight which is used to create the survey estimates.

**Data Collection and Editing:** For consistency across modes, the paper version is considered the master questionnaire and the Computer Assisted Telephone Interview (CATI), Computed Assisted Self Interview (CASI), and Mobile Computer Assisted Personal Interview (mCAPI) instruments are built to model the paper instrument. Questionnaire content and format are evaluated annually through a specifications process where requests for changes are evaluated and approved or disapproved. Input may vary from question wording or formatting to a program change involving the deletion or modification of current questions or addition of new ones. If there are significant changes to either the content or format proposed, a NASS survey methodologist will pre-test the changes for usability. Prior to the start of data collection, all modes of instruments are reviewed and the paper, mCAPI, CASI and CATI instruments are thoroughly tested.

All federal data collections require approval by the Office of Management and Budget (OMB). NASS must document the public need for the data, apply sound statistical practice, prove the data does not already exist elsewhere, and ensure the public is not excessively burdened. The cattle questionnaire must display an active OMB number that gives NASS the authority to conduct the survey, a statement of the purpose of the survey, and the use of the data being collected. Also, a response burden statement that gives an estimate of the time required to complete the form, a confidentiality statement that the respondent's information will only be used for statistical purposes in combination with other producers and a statement saying that response to the survey is voluntary and not required by law must be on the questionnaire.

In addition to asking the specific cattle items, all instruments collect information to verify the sampled unit, determine any changes in the name or address, identify any partners to detect possible duplication, verify the farm still qualifies for the target population, and identify any additional operations operated by the sampled operator.

Sampled farms and ranches receive a presurvey letter explaining the survey and that they will be contacted for survey purposes only. The letter provides the questions to be asked to allow respondents to prepare in advance and also provides a pass code they can use to complete the survey on the internet (CASI). All modes of data collection are utilized for cattle surveys. Regional Field Offices are given the option of conducting a mail out/mail back phase. While mail is the least costly mode of collection, the short data collection period and the uncertainty of postal delivery times limit its effectiveness. Most of the data are collected by CATI by individual Regional Field Offices and Data Collection Centers. Limited personal interviewing is done, generally for large operations or those with special handling arrangements. A program is run to determine if any sampled farms are in multiple on-going surveys, so data collection can be coordinated.

**Survey Edit:** As survey data are collected and captured, they are edited for consistency and reasonableness using automated systems. The edit logic ensures the coding of administrative data follows the methodological rules associated with the survey design. Relationships between data items on the current survey are verified and in certain situations those items may be compared to data from earlier surveys to make sure certain relationships are logical. The edit will determine the status of each record to be either "dirty" or "clean". Dirty records must be updated and reedited or certified by an analyst to be clean. If updates are needed, they are reedited interactively. Only clean records are eligible for analysis and summary.

**Analysis Tools:** Edited cattle data are processed through an interactive analysis tool which displays data for all reports by item. The tool provides scatter plots, tables, charts, and special tabulations that allow the analyst to compare an individual record to other similar records within their state. Outliers and unusual data relationships become evident and Regional Field Office staff will review them to determine if they are correct. The tool also allows comparison to previously reported data to detect large changes in the operation. Suspect data found to be in error are corrected, while data found to be correct are kept.

**Nonsampling Errors:** Nonsampling errors are present in any survey process. These errors include reporting, recording, editing, and imputation errors. Steps are taken to minimize the impact of these errors, such as questionnaire testing, comprehensive interviewer training, validation and verification of processing systems, detailed computer edits, and the analysis tool.

**Estimators:** Each farm and ranch in the sample has an initial sampling weight. This is the inverse of the sampling fraction. For example, if a stratum has 1,000 farms in the population and 200 are sampled for this survey, each sampled farm has a weight of 5. In other words, each sampled farm represents 5 farms. The nonoverlap tracts sampled to measure

the cattle not accounted for by the list have a weight determined by adjusting their original area frame weight by any second stage sampling weight.

Response to the January Cattle survey is voluntary. Some producers refuse to participate in the survey. Others cannot be located during the data collection period and some submit incomplete reports. These nonrespondents must be accounted for if accurate estimates of cattle are to be made. For the Cattle survey, nonrespondents are accounted for by adjusting the weights of the respondents. The adjustment occurs by stratum as the bounded strata represent homogeneous groupings of similar sized farms. The largest stratum is unbounded and is made up of large and, often unique, farms. Nonrespondents in this stratum and the nonoverlap tracts must be manually imputed by Regional Field Office statisticians and their weights are not adjusted. The adjustment is performed by individual item on the questionnaire (total cattle, beef cows, calf crop) so adjustments for item nonresponse (partial reports) and unit nonresponse (refusals and inaccessibles) are done in a single calculation. Using the previous example, if 180 of the original 200 respond, the weights of the 180 will be adjusted to 1,000 divided by 180, or 5.56.

Two estimators are used to compute direct measures of the cattle items. The “reweighted” estimator and the “adjusted” estimator are computationally identical except in how the nonresponse adjustments are made. The reweighted estimator uses a global weight adjustment across all usable reports. The nonresponse weight adjustment for the adjusted estimator uses an additional piece of information. When a sampled farm refuses to cooperate, interviewers will probe to determine the presence of cattle even though the number is not known. This presence/absence indicator is used in the weight adjustment.

Point estimates, called direct expansions, for both estimators are calculated by multiplying the reported value by the nonresponse adjusted weight and summing to a stratum total. A variance estimate is also computed at the stratum level. The nonoverlap tracts are treated as an additional stratum. Totals and variances are additive across strata to form a state estimate and states are additive to a national estimate.

Ratio estimates are also computed for many items. For example, beef cows can be estimated as a percent of total inventory. Ratio estimates use the reweighted estimator described above for the numerator and denominator. Both the numerator and denominator must be reported in order for that record to be used in the ratio estimator.

**Estimation:** When all samples are accounted for, all responses fully edited, and the analysis material is reviewed, each Regional Field Office executes the summary for their state. When all Regional Field Office have run summaries, Headquarters executes the national summary. Since all states conduct identical surveys, the samples can be pooled and national survey results computed. The summary results provide multiple point estimates and their standard errors for each data series being estimated. It also provides information used to assess the performance of the current survey and evaluate the quality of the survey estimates, such as strata level expansions, response rates, and percent of the expansion from usable reports.

Regional Field Offices are responsible for performing a detailed review of their survey results. Any irregularities revealed by the summary must be investigated and, if necessary, resolved. Using the historical relationship of the survey estimates to the official estimate, Regional Field Offices interpret the survey results and submit a recommended estimate to Headquarters. The data are viewed in tabular and graphical form and a consensus estimate is established. Regional Field Offices see their survey results only and do not have access to other states’ results. For some data series, information from other sources is also utilized in the process of establishing estimates.

For the national estimates, NASS assembles a panel of statisticians to serve as the Agricultural Statistics Board which reviews the national results and establishes the national estimates. Since larger sample sizes yield more precise results, NASS employs the “top-down” approach by determining the national estimates first and reconciling the state estimates to the national number for total cattle and the cattle classes. The ASB has the advantage of being able to examine results across states, compare the state recommendations, and utilize administrative data available only at the United States level. The same estimators used in the state summaries are produced by the national summary. The ASB follows the same approach the states do in determining the national estimate. The historical relationship of the survey estimates to the official estimate is evaluated over time to determine accuracy and bias using tables and graphs. Every 5 years NASS conducts the Census of Agriculture, which is an exhaustive data collection effort for all known farm operations across the

U.S. The information gathered from the Census of Agriculture is used to establish bench mark levels by which the survey estimators can be compared and bias determined. Survey based estimators can also be impacted by outliers – individual reports that have “excessive influence” on the results due to either improper classification or extremely unusual data for a given operation (i.e. operation is not representative of other operations). NASS thoroughly reviews the survey data to identify these situations and consider their impact on the survey results when establishing the official estimates.

External information (administrative data) is also utilized in the process of setting estimates. In order to be considered, these data must be deemed to be reliable and come from unbiased sources. The most common administrative data is commercial slaughter. NASS employs a balance sheet approach whenever possible to ensure that estimates are as accurate as possible. This approach typically is limited to national level estimates. A balance sheet and its components are reviewed when the inventory numbers are established. Commercial slaughter is an important element of the balance sheet at the national level since its high degree of reliability is based on a near-actual count of animals slaughtered. Live U.S. imports and exports to other countries are also considered.

Subtracting the disposition components of the balance sheet from supply components should, theoretically, give the current inventory. However, each component of the balance sheet has varying degrees of possible estimation error. To be most useful as an indication of inventory, therefore, each component is estimated on the basis of all available information. The supply components of the U.S. balance sheet are the beginning inventory, births, and imports (inshipments for State balance sheets). From this supply, the disposition components – commercial slaughter (marketings at State level), farm slaughter, deaths, and exports – are subtracted. The result is the indicated number on hand at the end of the period or year.

## Quality Metrics for Cattle

**Purpose and Definitions:** Under the guidance of the Statistical Policy Office of the Office of Management and Budget (OMB), the United States Department of Agriculture’s National Agricultural Statistics Service (NASS) provides data users with quality metrics for its published data series. The metrics tables below describe the performance data for all surveys contributing to the publication. The accuracy of data products may be evaluated through sampling and nonsampling error. The measurement of error due to sampling in the current period is irrelevant for a fully enumerated data series. Non-sampling error is evaluated by response rates and the percent of the estimate from reported data. For the January Cattle Survey both state-level and US-level estimates are published.

**Sample size** is the number of observations selected from the population to represent a characteristic of the population. Operations that did not have the item of interest or were out of business at the time of data collection have been excluded.

**Response rate** is the proportion of the above sample that completed the survey.

**Percent of estimate from usable reports** is the ratio of survey data expanded by the original sampling weight compared to survey data expanded by the nonresponse adjusted weight.

**Coefficient of variation** provides a measure of the size for the standard error relative to the point estimate and is used to measure the precision of the results of a survey estimator.

**Cattle Survey Sample Size and Response Rate:** To assist in evaluating the performance of the estimates in the cattle report, the sample size and response rates are displayed.

### Cattle Survey Sample Size and Response Rate - United States: January 1, 2019-2020

State	Sample size		Response rate	
	2019	2020	2019	2020
	(number)	(number)	(percent)	(percent)
United States .....	37,548	37,421	57.0	58.1

### Quality Metrics for Cattle by Class - United States: January 1, 2019-2020

Class	Percent of estimate from usable reports		Coefficient of variation	
	2019	2020	2019	2020
	(percent)	(percent)	(percent)	(percent)
Cattle and calves .....	71.5	70.9	0.9	0.9
Cows and heifers that have calved .....	68.3	67.5	1.0	1.0
Beef cows .....	66.4	65.5	1.2	1.3
Milk cows .....	75.9	75.5	1.1	1.0
Cattle on feed .....	89.8	89.7	1.0	1.5
Calf crop .....	67.6	67.4	1.0	1.1

**Quality Metrics for Cattle Survey - States and United States: January 1, 2019-2020**

State	Sample size		Response rate		All cattle and calves			
					Percent of estimate from usable reports		Coefficient of variation	
	2019	2020	2019	2020	2019	2020	2019	2020
	(number)	(number)	(percent)	(percent)	(percent)	(percent)	(percent)	(percent)
Alabama .....	748	747	63.2	63.5	72.9	70.4	5.1	5.2
Alaska .....	65	64	40.0	50.0	75.6	85.7	7.4	3.4
Arizona .....	287	292	50.9	59.9	88.0	84.3	3.2	2.9
Arkansas .....	735	717	72.9	64.3	80.0	70.9	8.1	7.0
California .....	1,285	1,335	53.7	45.4	69.6	68.7	4.5	3.7
Colorado .....	800	829	48.9	60.0	70.8	81.1	8.2	3.5
Connecticut .....	160	157	46.9	59.2	82.0	81.1	5.3	8.5
Delaware .....	82	78	35.4	32.1	73.2	65.9	10.1	9.4
Florida .....	740	786	55.1	52.2	64.5	62.2	6.8	4.9
Georgia .....	760	784	62.0	61.2	76.7	74.8	9.0	17.1
Hawaii .....	198	195	56.6	49.2	84.7	81.7	2.6	3.5
Idaho .....	951	899	48.3	57.0	79.9	82.5	2.2	6.7
Illinois .....	830	815	58.2	65.0	70.9	70.4	5.7	4.8
Indiana .....	892	869	51.8	58.7	66.0	69.9	8.0	7.6
Iowa .....	1,678	1,698	51.9	57.9	67.8	65.2	3.4	3.3
Kansas .....	1,533	1,495	48.5	52.3	72.7	77.3	2.5	3.0
Kentucky .....	1,045	1,156	55.2	58.4	65.6	63.0	5.2	4.7
Louisiana .....	439	453	72.9	61.4	78.6	73.9	10.4	5.6
Maine .....	191	201	59.7	62.7	75.7	77.9	6.8	9.2
Maryland .....	255	252	55.3	61.5	75.3	72.3	19.3	11.1
Massachusetts .....	162	162	45.1	58.6	67.0	70.9	11.2	11.4
Michigan .....	710	656	50.8	53.4	67.5	71.5	3.9	6.7
Minnesota .....	1,291	1,253	53.1	53.2	66.6	66.3	4.2	4.0
Mississippi .....	524	536	65.1	65.1	72.0	74.4	6.5	5.8
Missouri .....	1,432	1,420	56.1	54.8	69.0	62.3	4.0	3.5
Montana .....	827	788	61.9	58.1	64.9	64.7	3.8	10.2
Nebraska .....	1,949	1,863	59.8	58.8	76.2	74.4	2.7	3.2
Nevada .....	172	180	52.3	52.8	60.3	69.7	5.3	7.7
New Hampshire .....	115	121	51.3	57.0	76.2	71.6	7.1	7.1
New Jersey .....	168	166	47.0	56.6	66.4	61.3	24.4	13.1
New Mexico .....	497	536	65.8	62.9	78.7	74.3	5.4	3.2
New York .....	710	712	55.2	53.9	67.5	68.2	3.8	10.8
North Carolina .....	420	464	57.4	63.1	74.0	72.4	9.7	9.4
North Dakota .....	953	957	46.0	48.9	55.8	60.2	5.6	5.3
Ohio .....	912	875	52.2	48.5	60.4	61.5	9.7	7.7
Oklahoma .....	2,466	2,464	62.7	65.7	69.3	71.2	3.4	2.6
Oregon .....	627	550	53.9	62.0	68.4	74.2	5.9	4.9
Pennsylvania .....	1,344	1,369	60.7	55.8	67.9	60.7	4.8	4.2
Rhode Island .....	55	54	43.6	31.5	64.3	40.9	37.6	13.5
South Carolina .....	292	295	56.8	61.4	62.1	61.7	9.7	11.0
South Dakota .....	1,186	1,166	51.1	49.4	56.7	54.9	4.1	3.7
Tennessee .....	799	856	64.7	69.5	74.0	73.2	4.7	4.4
Texas .....	1,873	1,825	63.5	62.6	80.3	77.2	4.0	2.6
Utah .....	434	397	79.5	74.3	82.0	79.7	6.2	5.4
Vermont .....	273	271	55.7	66.1	63.7	73.5	6.9	3.4
Virginia .....	769	767	60.6	63.4	68.4	68.2	4.5	7.0
Washington .....	468	484	50.6	50.6	76.7	78.4	6.6	24.2
West Virginia .....	333	363	71.5	66.7	77.9	69.7	7.9	7.0
Wisconsin .....	1,325	1,298	54.7	56.6	66.1	66.7	3.5	3.8
Wyoming .....	788	751	61.3	60.3	66.3	67.2	3.0	3.9
United States .....	37,548	37,421	57.0	58.1	71.5	70.9	0.9	0.9

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Questionnaires .....	Data Collection Branch	(202) 720-6201	HQ_CSD_DCB@usda.gov
Sampling and Editing .....	Sampling Editing and Imputation Methodology Branch	(202) 720-5805	HQ_CSD_SB@usda.gov
Summary and Estimators .....	Summary Estimation and Disclosure Methodology Branch	(202) 720-4008	HQ_SD_SMB@usda.gov
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Media Contact and Webmaster ....	Public Affairs Office	(202) 720-2639	HQOAPAO@usda.gov

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- Both national and state specific reports are available via a free e-mail subscription. To set-up this free subscription, visit [www.nass.usda.gov](http://www.nass.usda.gov) and click on “National” or “State” in upper right corner above “search” box to create an account and select the reports you would like to receive.
- Cornell’s Mann Library has launched a new website housing NASS’s and other agency’s archived reports. The new website, <https://usda.library.cornell.edu>. All email subscriptions containing reports will be sent from the new website, <https://usda.library.cornell.edu>. To continue receiving the reports via e-mail, you will have to go to the new website, create a new account and re-subscribe to the reports. If you need instructions to set up an account or subscribe, they are located at: <https://usda.library.cornell.edu/help>. You should whitelist [notifications@usda-esmis.library.cornell.edu](mailto:notifications@usda-esmis.library.cornell.edu) in your email client to avoid the emails going into spam/junk folders.

For more information on NASS surveys and reports, call the NASS Agricultural Statistics Hotline at (800) 727-9540, 7:30 a.m. to 4:00 p.m. ET, or e-mail: [nass@usda.gov](mailto:nass@usda.gov).

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