

Highlights of Beef 2007–08 Part III: Changes in the U.S. Beef Cow-calf Industry, 1993–2008

In 2007–08, the USDA’s National Animal Health Monitoring System (NAHMS) conducted a study of U.S. beef cow-calf operations. Beef 2007–08 collected data on cow-calf health and management practices in 24 States.* These States represented 79.6 percent of U.S. operations with beef cows and 87.8 percent of U.S. beef cows.

The following highlights were excerpted from the report released in May 2009: “Part III: Changes in the U.S. Beef Cow-Calf Industry, 1993–2008.” Part III provides demographic changes of the U.S. beef cow-calf industry from data provided by the National Agricultural Statistics Service and the Census of Agriculture, and a comparison of health and management practices on U.S. beef operations as identified from three NAHMS beef-cow studies: the Cow/calf Health and Productivity Audit 1992/93 (CHAPA), Beef '97, and Beef 2007–08.

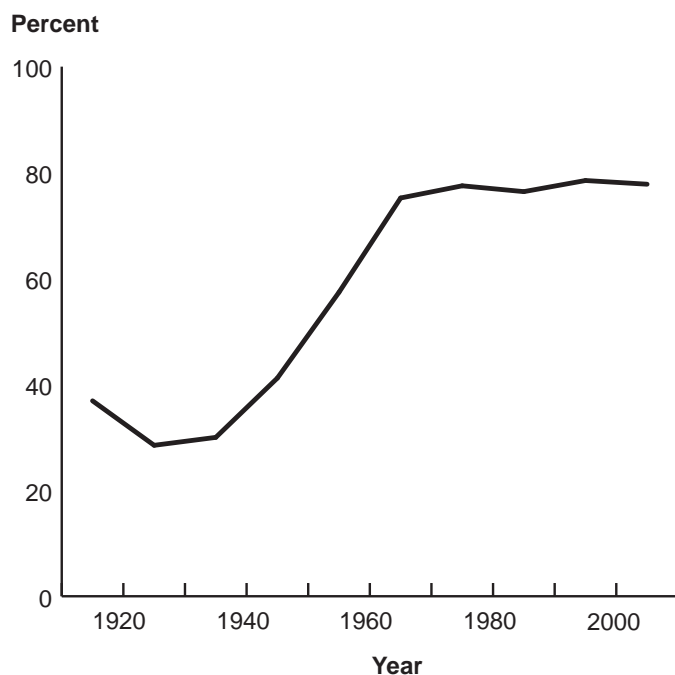
Demographic Changes

- On January 1, 2008, the United States had 32.4 million beef cows, about 2.5 times the 12.5 million in 1920. These 32.4 million beef cows accounted for 77.8 percent of all cows in 2008 (figure 1). In comparison, the 12.5 million beef cows in 1920 accounted for only 36.9 percent of all U.S. cows at that time.

*States:

Alabama, Arkansas, California, Colorado, Florida, Georgia, Idaho, Iowa, Kansas, Kentucky, Louisiana, Mississippi, Missouri, Montana, Nebraska, New Mexico, North Dakota, Oklahoma, Oregon, South Dakota Tennessee, Texas, Virginia, and Wyoming.

Figure 1. Change in Percentage of Beef Cows as a Percentage of All Cows, 1920-2008

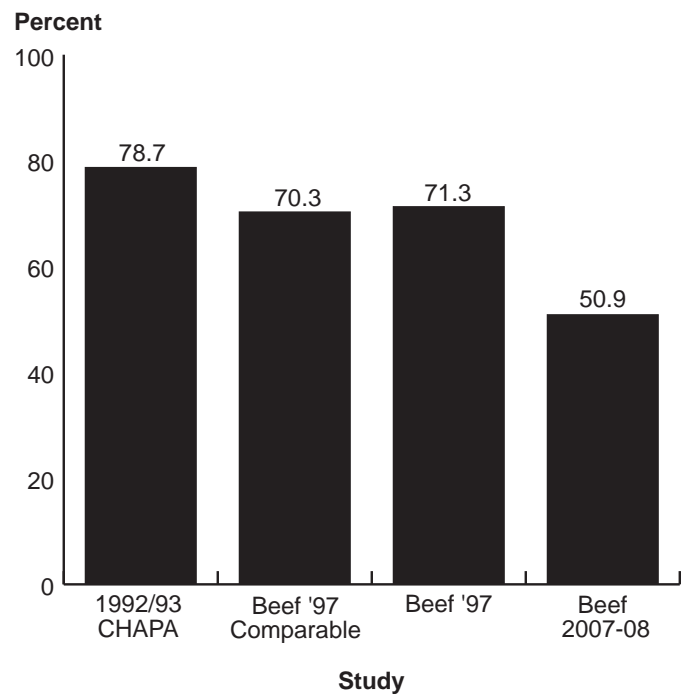


- The January 1, 2008, number of beef cows was 97.2 percent of the 1993 number.
- The number of beef-cow operations in the United States has declined gradually since 1995. In 2007, there were 766,350 operations with one or more beef cows in the United States, which is 85.4 percent of the 1995 number of beef operations.
- About one of every three of the 2.08 million farms and ranches in the United States have beef cows. The average herd size increased from about 37 beef cows in 1992 to about 42 in 2007.

Management practices

- Following an increase from 1992 to 1997, the percentage of operations that utilized hand-written records was similar between 1997 and 2007 (79.1 and 78.6 percent, respectively). The percentage of operations that used an on-site computer for record keeping increased from 1992 to 2007 (4.7 to 17.0 percent, respectively). Despite this increase, fewer than one of five operations used an on-site computer for record keeping in 2007. The use of any record-keeping system has remained stable over the last 10 years.
- For all study years, veterinarians were identified by the highest percentage of operations as a very important source of information. In 1992, 34.3 percent of operations reported that beef magazines and agricultural journals were very important sources of information compared with just 17.6 percent of operations in 2007.
- The percentage of calves marketed with horns decreased from 8.4 percent in 1992 to 6.3 percent in 2007.
- Weaning weights were higher in 2007 than in 1992 and 1997 (530, 502, and 515 pounds, respectively).
- Despite heavier weaning weights in 2007, average age of calves at weaning decreased from 221 days in 1997 to 207 days in 2007.
- The percentage of bulls on operations that performed a semen test, scrotal measurement, or *Tritrichomonas* culture increased from 1997 to 2007.
- The percentage of replacement heifers that required no assistance during calving increased slightly from 1997 to 2007 (83.3 to 88.4 percent, respectively). Conversely, the percentage of cows that required no assistance decreased slightly from 1997 to 2007 (97.3 to 95.7 percent, respectively). The percentages of heifers and cows that required no assistance were similar in 1992 and 1997.
- The percentage of operations that gave intramuscular injections decreased from 1992 to 2007 (78.7 to 50.9 percent, respectively), a trend consistent with efforts to ensure beef quality (figure 2).

Figure 2. For Operations in Which the Operator or any Unpaid or Hired Worker Gave Injections to any Beef Cattle During the Previous 12 Months, Percentage of Operations that Gave One or More Intramuscular Injections



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