



Issue 14

## Livestock Data in the United States: How is it collected?

Livestock data collection is notoriously complicated. As far back as 1957, Ray Hurley - former Chief of the Agriculture Division of the US Bureau of the Census - noted: *'in analyzing the [US] census experience covering 16 nationwide censuses and almost 120 years, one concludes that the nationwide collection of satisfactory livestock data ... is a difficult task and involves a number of problems. Even the job of obtaining a count of livestock is fraught with difficulties. Livestock numbers change every day of the year. Marketing is a continuous process. Livestock inventories are affected by births, deaths, farm slaughter, and by growth and change in age of animals'* (Hurley, 1957).

Yet 60 years later, livestock survey data is regularly and extensively used in the United States by various stakeholders to formulate agricultural policies, monitor programs, observe, develop new programs and services, and evaluate industry performance. Farm survey data is integrated with trade statistics, industry-based slaughter statistics and other related data, to provide an up-to date picture of the industry.

### The Livestock Industry in the United States

Producing approximately 42 million tons of meat/year, in 2011 the United States accounts for an estimated 14 percent of global meat supplies and ranks only behind China and the EU-27 as one of the world's largest meat producers. The value of the livestock sector is estimated at almost US\$120 billion, approximately 40 percent of the total estimated value of agricultural sector production in 2011 of 410.2 billion. It also maintains a strong

export presence, with meat exports in 2011 estimated at 7 million tons, estimated to account for approximately 25 percent of global trade.

Supporting the success of the industry, in addition to a resource base which supports a competitive sector, are synergies between private sector and Government in the area of livestock data collection, analysis and dissemination.

Value of US Livestock Production  
(Billion US\$)

Sub-sector	2007	2011
Meat animals	65.1	84.9
Dairy products	35.5	39.4
Poultry/eggs	33.1	36.2
Misc. Livestock	4.9	4.8
Home consumption	0.3	.4
<b>Total<sup>1</sup></b>	<b>138.4</b>	<b>164.1</b>

<sup>1</sup> includes inventory adjustment

Source: NASS and Economic Research Service, USDA

### The Role of the US Department of Agriculture in Collecting, Analysing and Disseminating Livestock Data

The US Department of Agriculture National Agricultural Statistics Service (NASS), supported by an annual budget of about US\$159 million, is the entity which conducts hundreds of surveys every year and prepares reports covering many aspects of the U.S. agriculture. To ensure adequate coverage of the livestock sector, NASS regularly undertakes approximately 12 livestock, 13 poultry and 4 dairy surveys, the

## Selected US Livestock Reports / Statistics

Reports	Data / Indicator	Frequency per year
Cattle Inventories	No. of cattle/milk cows/bulls; no. of heifers held for breeding; no. of cattle/calves raised for meat production; no. of calves born	2
Cattle on Feed	Monthly cattle/calves on feed, placement, marketing and other disappearance (deaths, return to grazing, movement to other feedlots)	12
Livestock Slaughter	No. of animals slaughtered (by species and class) in federally inspected plants, post-mortem condemnation, daily live and dressed weights.	12
Poultry Slaughter	No. of poultry slaughtered under federal inspection	12
Hog and Pigs Inventories	Inventory, breeding herd, market hogs, sow farrowing, pig crops, pigs per litter; Pigs per litter by size of operation	3
Milk Production	Milk cow inventory, milk production, milk production/cow	12
Dairy Products	Stocks, shipments, prices received, production for products such as butter, cheese, dry whey, ice cream and non-fat dry milk	12
Dairy Product Pricing	Prices of dairy products: cheddar cheese in 40 pound blocks and 500 pound barrels, butter, nonfat dry milk and dry whey. Sales volume	52
Broiler Hatchery	No. of broiler hatcheries, chicks hatched, chicks placed, chicken & egg inventory, layers	52
Turkey Hatchery	Size of laying flock, number of pullets, production and value, eggs/100 layers	12
Chicken and Egg	Total egg production, forced molting, chicks hatched, eggs in incubators, replacement breeder, supply flocks. Turkeys, pullets placed, no. raised, production & value	12

frequency of which varies depending on the product. While more than 1,000 staff, in Washington DC and in the individual 50 States collect data through surveys, censuses, targeted questionnaires, and special surveys, approximately 18 professionals coordinate the analysis of the livestock data, releasing monthly, weekly and annual publications.

The most comprehensive statistical reports are released annually for all agricultural sectors, including a report on 'cattle, hogs, and sheep' and one on 'dairy and poultry statistics'. A list of selected reports on livestock data / statistics produced by NASS is presented in the table above. National and State level data are available in an on-line database, accessible at: [www.nass.usda.gov](http://www.nass.usda.gov) under the heading 'Data and Statistics'.

### Conclusions

The collection and analysis of timely and accurate livestock data facilitates the ability of planners to support sector development and optimizes investment decisions while minimizing uncertainties and risks associated with the production, marketing and distribution of livestock and products.

The quality and the usefulness of the data is reviewed in annual USDA data users meeting to

solicit comments and suggestions on the statistical and economic reports issued by the Department of Agriculture and the Census Bureau.

NASS, in its efforts to provide timely, accurate, and useful statistics in service to U.S. agriculture is committed to: (i) report the facts on American agriculture; (ii) provide objective and unbiased statistics that is fair and impartial to all market participants; (iii) serve the needs of data users and customers at a local level through networks of State field offices and a cooperative relationship with universities and State Departments of Agriculture; (iv) guarantee that confidentiality and data security are top priorities.

For further information please visit:

[www.africalivestockdata.org](http://www.africalivestockdata.org)

[www.nass.usda.gov](http://www.nass.usda.gov)

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