

## The National Cow Herd -- The National Cow Herd

### Southeast Region

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I'll be discussing the Southeastern portion of the national cow herd: the 11 states from Louisiana and Arkansas up through Tennessee, Kentucky, and Virginia and down through the Carolinas into Florida.

This area, home to 346,500 producers and more than eight million beef cows, takes in 13 percent of the land, 24.9 percent of the cows, and 24.5 percent of the producers in the United States (Table 1).

Operations and cattle inventory vary within the area. In Florida, 61 percent of the inventory is in herds of more than 500 head; in Tennessee, only 4 percent of the cattle are in herds of more than 500 head. In Tennessee, 85 percent of the operators have less than 49 head; in Florida, 3.4 percent of the operations have more than 500 head.

In the Southeast, we raise a lot of chickens, peanuts, cotton, soybeans, pecans, rice, tobacco, vegetables, hogs, cattle, wildlife, and pine trees.

The land varies from mountains to ocean and from delta to swamp, with a little bit of everything else in between. Rainfall averages 40 to 55 inches a year. Southeastern soils run from deep sand to heavy clay; they tend to be acid and have low fertility.

Part of the Eastern area is divided into Coastal Plain, Piedmont and Mountain areas. Forage include fescue, bermuda grass, orchard grass, bluegrass, bahia, clover, pangola, millet and winter annuals. Producers in the region grow 18,860,000 acres of fescue.

Stocking rates depend on location, grasses, soil types, climate and other variables within the region. Beef produced per acre can vary all over the area, depending on the kind of forage, the amount of fertilizer, the grazing method and the class of cattle.

Winter feed in the southeast is hay, silage, winter annuals, fescue, molasses and all forms of protein. The calving season runs from October through March, with a high percentage of calves born from November through February. We still have too few producers on a controlled breeding season. Expenses for running brood cows vary from low investment native pasture in the Virginia mountains and Florida flatwoods to investments, white-board-fence operations. The bottom line needs to be profit, regardless of the amount produced per acre.

As you can see, the region spans a variety of conditions. That's what makes the beef cow great -- she can adapt to all kinds of conditions.

Table 1

	Cattle on feed	Beef Producers	Beef cows	Milk Cows	Land Sq. Miles
Ala	30,000	39,000	875,000	40,000	50,708
Ark	12,000	29,000	945,000	72,000	51,945
Fla	20,000	18,000	1,086,000	179,000	54,090
Ga	12,000	30,000	703,000	102,000	58,037
Ky	25,000	47,000	1,017,000	218,000	39,650
La	9,000	21,500	615,000	87,000	44,930
Ms	14,000	29,000	706,000	68,000	47,296
NC	25,000	28,000	320,000	105,000	48,798
SC	20,000	15,000	284,000	43,000	30,225
Tn	30,000	60,000	966,000	204,000	41,328
Va	40,000	30,000	690,000	145,000	39,780
11 States	237,000	346,500	8,207,000	1,263,000	506,787
% of US	2%	24.5%	24.9%	12.25%	13%



Back in the 1950's and 60's, we had three or four beef breeds and the dairy breeds. Now it's a little different. New breeds are about as common as new breakfast cereals. In my lifetime, breeds have ranged from dwarfs to giants; and both were wrong. Researchers have done alot of studies on cow size and efficiency, but cattle adaptability and productivity, consumer acceptance, and profit on your ranch or farm may be the best tests.

In our departmental staff meetings, or driving to and from meetings, I guess we get to talking about cow size, breeds and a lot of other things that don't relate to the cow business. Some people have the idea the whole world is frame 8 or bigger, and that all cows are one color. Most of the time somebody will recommend a visit to the auction barn to see the real world.

I didn't call all the states and ask them about their cow herds. I decided to get some information about Georgia that is not guesswork or speculation. So I asked the Market News Branch of the USDA to help us with a cow profile study. Ernest Morgan of the Federal-State Livestock Market News & Grading Service and his staff collected the data. Market livestock specialists at 23 selected markets selected data (Table 2). These data included the marketing of both slaughter and feeder/replacement cows.

The study covered six weeks, from the week of February 22 through the week of March 28. There were 14,279 cows in the data base. We asked the specialists to record cows in five weight breaks, three frame sizes and seven breeds/colors (Table 3).

The results of the profile are in Table 4. As you can see, we still have a lot of small-framed cows in our state; however, most of the cows were in the medium frame group, and I would guess a high number of cows in the large frame group were Holstein cows.

Dairy or dairy cross/Holstein made up 17 percent of the total. This is not too far off, since 13 percent of our total cow population in Georgia is milk cows. The interesting thing to me is that a high percent of our cows are still English-base cows, with only 7 percent to 9 percent being Charolais, exotic or Brahman influence cows. Now, I know some overlap exists among what might have been exotic crosses, dairy cows, blacks, red necks, etc.; but I'm not sure anybody could do much better recording breed of cows. So Georgia cows are mainly medium frame, and most of them are English cross.

In the 11 Southeastern states, breed variations will exists from south to north, with Brahman influence having a higher percent in the south. Florida will have a higher percent Brahman influence, and Kentucky and Virginia will have a lower percent. Also, a lot depends on the number of dairy producers in a given state and the number purebred breeders in the state.

I don't doubt we need to do a better job educating people about crossbreeding systems. Mongrelization is going on in the country. Obviously, a large percent of the cows in our study are crossbred, but

Table 2  
Auction Locations



**Table 3**  
**Georgia Cow Herd Profile**

Weight	Under 800 lbs. 805 - 900 905 - 1100 1105 - 1295 1300 - up
Frame	Small Medium Large
Breed or Color	Black (Angus) Black White Face Hereford-Redneck Charolais-Charolais Cross Exotic Cross-Limousin-Simmental, etc. Dairy or Dairy Cross-Holstein Earcross-Brahman-Brahman Cross

**Table 4**  
**Georgia Cow Herd Profile**  
**6 Weeks Feb. 22 - April 1**  
**14,279 Cows**

<u>Weight</u>	<u>Number</u>	<u>Percent</u>
Under 600	3999	28
805 - 900	2909	20
905 - 1100	4384	31
1105 - 1295	1890	13
1300 - up	1097	8
<u>Frame</u>	<u>Number</u>	<u>Percent</u>
Small	4181	29.3
Medium	7048	49.4
Large	3050	21.3
<u>Breed Color</u>	<u>Number</u>	<u>Percent</u>
Black (Angus)	3677	25.5
Black White Face	1863	13
Hereford/Red Neck	3068	21.5
Charolais and/or Cross	1280	9
Exotic-Lim-Sim-,etc.	987	7
Dairy and/or Holst.	2417	17
Ear Cross-Brahman and/ or Brahman Cross	987	7



I'm not sure it's as bad as Bob Hiller's ad indicates. It's hard to plan crossbreeding systems and get adaption when 84 percent of your operations have fewer than 49 head of cattle. That has been our excuse.

As Dave Pingrey said at a CSRS review in Mississippi last month, "These people are there, they have always been there, and will always be there, so let's get after helping them instead of making excuses." Well said, I thought, and it sure hit home for us in Georgia.

Now, in my opinion, EPD's are going to really help us do this. We will know more about the bulls we use, the accuracy of a given trait will be higher, and we can plan with confidence. There's no question that the EPD's of carcass traits are just around the corner and will be just as usable.

We get excited about forage when we discuss the future in the Southeast. A new bermuda, 30 percent better than coastal, is being developed; and a new bahia grass has been released. A fescue for the lower south is being developed, and a millet cross that lasts the whole season is in its third year of testing. All this, plus Endophyte - free fescue really get you excited about the future of cattle in the Southeast.

In summary, don't pour us all from the same mold. Cattle are adaptable; they are products of the land and of the breeding programs, not of a feedlot or a packing house. When the cattle won't work for the land owner, under his environment, the rest will not exist.