COW/CALF CORNER

The Newsletter

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Cattle and beef trade: a look back and a look ahead

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Beef exports in 2019 were down 4.4 percent compared to 2018. Exports were down year over year to most major destinations including Japan (-10.0 percent); Hong Kong (-24.7 percent); Mexico (-5.4 percent) and Canada (-10.6 percent). Among major markets, only South Korea was up 7.1 percent year over year.

Japan accounted for the largest share of 2019 beef exports at 26.4 percent of the total. South Korea is the second largest market with 22.6 percent of total exports. Number three market Mexico represented 14.0 percent of beef exports. Canada is fourth at 8.9 percent followed closely by Hong Kong with a 7.7 percent share of the total. The top five markets along with Taiwan at 5.8 percent represent 86.1 percent of total exports. Beef exports to China increased in the second half of 2019 bringing the total for the year to a 1.1 percent share of total exports.

Total beef imports increased 2.0 percent year over year in 2019. Beef imports were 7.0 percent higher from Canada and represented 27.7 percent of total imports. Number two beef import source Australia increased 6.5 percent year over year and was 23.4 percent of the import total. Mexico is the third largest source of beef imports, up 14.1 percent year over year in 2019, and accounting for 19.0 percent of the total. New Zealand is the fourth largest source of beef imports at 13.1 percent of imports but was down 29.9 percent year over year.

Total cattle imports increased 7.6 percent year over year in 2019. This includes a 2.7 percent increase in feeder cattle from Mexico and Canada and a 25.5 percent increase year over year in cattle for slaughter from Canada. Total cattle imports from Canada were 722,809 head, up 14.6 percent. Total imports from Mexico were 1,319,944 head, up 4.1 percent year over year.

Beef exports are expected to increase in 2020 with better prospects in China due to growing beef demand in general and enhanced protein needs from African Swine Fever (ASF). However, reduced exports to Hong Kong may offset growing beef exports to mainland China as trade flows into China become officially recognized. Additionally, the bilateral trade deal with Japan mostly restores U.S. beef competitive position in the country lost with U.S. withdrawal from the Trans-Pacific Partnership; and is expected to slow or halt the 2019 erosion in beef exports to the largest market for U.S. beef.

Australia is expected to see reduced beef production and exports, which will reduce exports to the U.S. and other global markets and may allow the U.S. to surpass Australia as the third largest beef exporting country. Less beef from Australia will contribute to a projected decrease in U.S. beef imports in 2020. The U.S. may see reduced beef imports as several major beef exporting countries, such as New Zealand, redirect increasing amounts of beef to China, which continues to dominate global beef trade. Improved beef trade prospects are part of the general optimism for stronger cattle and beef markets in 2020.

Choosing the estrous synchronization protocol appropriate for various AI programs

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Beef producers that use artificial insemination in their breeding program use estrus synchronization to better utilize their labor resources both during breeding and calving seasons. Choosing the synchronization protocol that best fits each individual situation is challenging because so many options are currently available. The Beef Reproductive Task Force is a committee of animal scientists from seven land grant universities in the United States. This committee is made up of beef reproduction scientists and extension specialists that have been instrumental in conducting research and evaluating estrus synchronization protocols. Each year they review the research and make recommendations of estrous synchronization systems that the committee agrees will give producers the best choices for their situations.

Producers need to decide how much “heat detection” that they feel that they can do successfully. Some producers can take the time to do “heat detection” for a couple of weeks. Other producers can find the time to be good at “heat detection” for only a few days, while many other producers would prefer not to “heat detect” at all. Therefore the Beef Reproductive Task Force has categorized different estrous synchronization protocols accordingly. Also the committee has made appropriate recommendations for synchronization systems for yearling replacement heifers and for adult cows (currently nursing calves).

Different protocols require varying numbers of trips the cattle must go through the working chute. Availability of good working equipment and labor should also be factors in choosing the best protocol for any given operation.

Beef producers can download the 2019 Estrous Synchronization Protocols for Heifers and Cows as well as several helpful fact sheets and planning tools by clicking on the Applied Reproductive

Strategies in Beef Cattle website brought to you by the Beef Reproduction Task Force. The URL is http://beefrepro.unl.edu/resources.html . If you utilize artificial insemination or estrus synchronization with natural service you will find this information quite valuable. Keep in mind that most of the synchronization products are only available by a prescription from your local food animal veterinarian.

Most of the protocols described require that planning and purchasing of the products used must done several days and in some cases several weeks in advance. Don't wait until the last minute before the spring breeding season to decide which synchronization protocol best fits your situation.