

RUMINANT LIVESTOCK PRODUCTION IN THE NORTHERN GREAT PLAINS

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Ruminant livestock production in North Dakota, South Dakota, Montana, and Wyoming is critical to the region's economy. In 2002, 59 percent of farms and ranches in the four-state study area raised beef cattle, while more than 8 percent raised sheep and lambs. In 2004 in the four-state area cattle and calves accounted for one-third of farm and ranch receipts,

ranging from 16 percent statewide in North Dakota to 75 percent statewide in Wyoming.

Because of the economic significance of ruminant livestock production, producers in the four-state area are continually looking for opportunities to increase income and improve the viability of their farm and ranch operation. Accordingly, the Four-state Ruminant Consortium, an integrated research and extension program, was created to specifically address issues related to ruminant livestock production. The purpose of the Four-State Ruminant Consortium is to enhance economic development in the target study area of southwestern North Dakota, northwestern South Dakota, southeastern Montana, and northeastern Wyoming by strengthening and capturing value from the ruminant livestock industry. This study sought to identify opportunities for and constraints to expanding value-added enterprises within the beef cow-calf sector.

The beef producers surveyed reported an average cow herd of 215 head and a calf crop of 204 head (95 percent). They retained an average of 36 replacement heifers (17 percent). Of the remaining calves, 64 percent were sold at or soon after weaning, and the remaining 36 percent were still on the ranch as of January 1. Of the survey respondents, 74 percent reported that they market some or all of their calves at weaning, while 51 percent reported that they background some calves on their ranch. Backgrounding was more common for ranchers with larger herds. Of those with 300 cows or more, two-thirds reported backgrounding some animals, compared to only 42 percent of those with less than 100 cows. Overall, 61 percent of the calf crop was sold at weaning, 3 percent was marketed 15 to 45 days after weaning, and 17 percent was marketed 46 to 120 days after weaning. Ranchers' preference for marketing alternatives varied between states; two-thirds of calves in Wyoming were sold at weaning, compared to 51 percent in North Dakota. Conversely, 29 percent of calves in North Dakota were marketed 45 to 120 days after weaning, compared to 9 percent in Wyoming. *Auction markets were the primary marketing channel regionally and accounted for 59 percent of calves marketed.* Auctions accounted for the majority of calves sold in each state except Montana. Auctions were the predominate marketing outlet for producers with smaller herds; of those with herds less than 100 head, almost 77 percent of the calves were sold through auctions. On the other hand, larger volume producers more frequently used alternate marketing channels. For ranchers with herds of 300 or more, only 38 percent of calves were marketed through auctions, 19 percent were marketed through video sales, 17 percent to order buyers, and 12 percent through contract sales.

References.

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