

## A Family Affair

Cattle and beef production represent the largest single segment of American agriculture. In fact, the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) says more farms are classified as beef cattle operations (31 percent) than any other type of farm. USDA's 2007 Census of Agriculture classified 687,540 farms as beef cattle operations.

There are more than 1 million beef producers in the United States who are responsible for more than 94 million head of beef cattle.

Most farms and ranches in the United States, including cattle ranches, are family owned and operated. Even the largest farms tend to be family farms. More than 97 percent of beef cattle farms and ranches are classified as family farms.

When it comes to beef cattle production, most operations are smaller than you might think; according to USDA, the majority of beef cattle operations (79%) have less than 50 head of cattle. Although cattle farms and ranches are spread across the United State, nearly a third of cattle operations are located in the Plains states.

## Cattle Income

According to USDA's Economic Research Service (ERS), the average annual gross income from livestock on farms in this country is \$41,232. The average gross cash income from a cattle operation in 2007 was \$62,286, the lowest income of any type of farm.

Less than one-third of cattle operators claim farming as their primary occupation and 19 percent consider themselves retired. However, 61 percent say they work more than 1,000 hours a year on their farming operations. According to USDA's 2007 Census of Agriculture, 80 percent of the primary operators for beef cattle farms and ranches live on the farm or ranch.

## Demographics

According to USDA's 2007 Census of Agriculture, the average age of the American farmer is 57 years old. The average age for farmers has been above 50 since the 1974 Census of Agriculture and has increased in each census since that time.

Cattle operations have long been considered family traditions, handed down from generation to generation. In a survey conducted by the Iowa Beef Center, 60 percent of Iowa beef producers are expected to pass their operation on to their children.

The 2007 Census of Agriculture also found that the average number of years a beef producer has been on the farm or ranch is 22 years. In fact, 75 percent of beef cattle ranchers and farmers have been on the farm 10 or more years.

According to ERS, nearly one in five cattle producers is a college graduate, one in four has attended some college and 89 percent are high school graduates.

## Impact on Society

Beef production affects the U.S. economy. According to USDA, producers of meat animals in 2008 were responsible for more than \$66 billion in added value to the U.S. economy, as measured by their contribution to the national output.