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Range and Pasture Conditions

It is hard to find any negatives in the cattle industry when fed cattle are selling for \$80/cwt. in August and calves are expected to exceed \$100/cwt. this fall. A large corn crop is expected with corresponding relative low prices. In general, range and pasture conditions are much improved from last year. For the 48 contiguous states, the latest range and pasture index show that 42% of the pastures were rated either Good or Excellent and only 27% were rated Very Poor or Poor. This compares to last year when only 27% of the pastures were rated either Good or Excellent and 46% were rated Very Poor or Poor.

However, as always there are some regional differences in the pasture conditions. Four states have over half of their pastures rated Very Poor or Poor: New Mexico, 76%; California, 60%; Arizona, 59%; and Kansas 55%. Four more states have nearly half their pastures in the Very Poor or Poor rating: Colorado, 47%; Missouri, 46%; Montana, 44%; and Nebraska, 42%. By contrast, North and South Dakota only have 26% of their pastures rated Very Poor or Poor and Texas and Oklahoma only have 30% of their pastures in these categories. Pastures in the Southeastern U.S. are generally in very good condition and the Northwest U.S. also is in good condition.

Cattle producers in the dry areas of the country need to continue to manage pastures for long-term productivity and profitability. While it may be tempting to overgraze pastures this year and sell more pounds of cattle at the favorable price level, this will be a short-sited approach if future productivity is seriously damaged.

The Markets

Slaughter cattle prices were sharply higher in the southern plains, with the bulk of the trade occurring at \$80. Prices were \$5 higher in the north with slaughter cattle prices at \$128-129 dressed. Choice boxed beef prices were higher for the week and the Choice -Select spread increased. Feeder cattle trade in Kansas saw markets steady to higher for calves and yearlings while no sales were reported in Nebraska.

	Last Week	Previous Week	Last Year
Kansas Fed Steer Price, live weight (35-65% Choice)	\$79.93	\$76.56	\$62.63
Neb. Fed Steer Price, dressed weight (35-65% Choice)	\$128.25	\$123.32	\$99.43
700-800 lb. Feeder Steer Price, Kansas 4 market average	\$95.22	\$94.38	\$80.38
500-600 lb. Feeder Steer Price, Kansas 4 market average	\$103.42	\$101.68	\$84.88
700-800 lb. Feeder Steer Price, Neb. 7 market average	NA	\$96.54	\$82.31
500-600 lb. Feeder Steer Price, Neb. 7 market average	NA	\$107.81	\$92.38
Choice Boxed Beef Price, 600-750 lb. carcass	\$133.81	\$128.60	\$109.54
Choice-Select Spread, 600-750 lb. carcass	\$6.54	\$4.86	\$5.10