

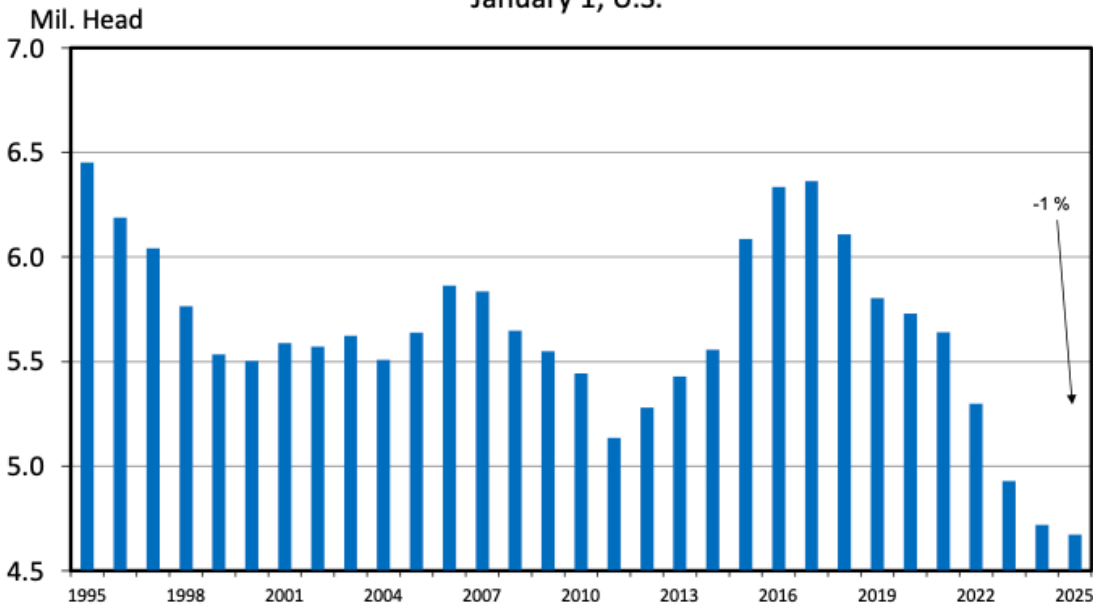


Replacement Heifer Inventory: The Past and the Present

Going into 2025, one of the main questions is still *when* we will start expanding. An additional question is *can* we start expanding. The current number of heifers held as beef cow replacements is 4.6 million head, down roughly 1 percent year over year. This is the smallest ‘pool’ of replacement heifers since 1949. Included in this number is the 2.9 million bred heifers that will calve this year, down roughly 2 percent. This number is set, meaning we can’t go back and breed heifers in 2024. What will be interesting to see in next year’s inventory report is if there will be any “impulse breeding” in 2025 (bred heifers that were not originally planned to be held as replacements). This will be one indicator of producers starting to stabilize and rebuild. Additionally, without a large inventory of replacement heifers, cow culling will have to slow even more than it did in 2024 if cow numbers are to stabilize.



HEIFERS HELD AS BEEF COW REPLACEMENTS
January 1, U.S.



Data Source: USDA-NASS
Livestock Marketing Information Center

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However, let’s just look at where we are now in terms of beef replacements. During the last cattle cycle, expansion started in 2015, and we expanded relatively quickly. This caused prices to also drop relatively quickly. When looking at the graph below, we see that we were holding back heifers starting in 2012. We were ready to expand when the time came because we had the heifer inventory to do so. In this current cycle, we see that we have steadily depleted our heifer inventory and are currently showing no signs of heavy retention in the

near future. This is one factor that makes this cycle different and why high prices are expected to last longer than they did in the last cycle. Even if producers who can start rebuilding do so in 2025, a drastic change in supply and prices nationwide is not expected with the current inventory of replacement heifers.

On one hand, high prices are incentive enough for some producers to keep selling weaned heifers rather than retaining. On the other hand, high prices may encourage others to start retaining rather than selling. Point being, not everyone will be able to rebuild with current prices for replacement cattle. But those who can, should be thinking about starting the expansion process soon. It will be extremely important for producers to make well thought out, economic decisions based on the structure, resources, and goals *of their specific operation* over these next few years.

Questions, contact Hannah at h.baker@ufl.edu

See this update and other helpful resources online at <https://rrec-ona.ifas.ufl.edu/about/directory/staff/hannah-baker/>

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