United States cattle numbers on 1 July 1975 were a record high of 140.1 million head, 1 per cent above a year earlier and 7 per cent above 1 July 1973. The small increase from 1974 is a result of record slaughter, heavy cow cullings, and continued high heifer slaughter.

Commercial cattle slaughter is currently up 11 per cent from 1974 levels. For 1975 total cattle slaughter is expected to be almost 41 million head up 10 per cent from 1974. Of the total, cow slaughter might total 10 million head, a third larger than last year. Calf slaughter may be about 4.5 million head, up almost 50 per cent from 1974.

Although slaughter is up substantially, beef production is only up 3 per cent. This is because lighter weight non-fed marketings made up a much larger proportion of the total slaughter than a year ago. During the first eight months of 1974 fed cattle marketings made up over 70 per cent of total cattle slaughter. In 1975, fed cattle marketings are only about 55 per cent of the total. As a result average slaughter weights are off about 50 pounds per head for 1975 to date compared with 1974. By the fourth quarter, however, a full year of declining average slaughter weights will about bottom out, as the increased placements of cattle on feed during the early summer come to market. Then, production should begin to increase more than slaughter as average weights increase.

Cattle prices have held firm since mid-summer in the $47-49 range for choice steers, Omaha basis. Choice feeder steers are holding in the $33-35 range. Prices are expected to decline seasonally this fall, probably about $3-5 per hundredweight as heavy slaughter rates continue. Substantially reduced pork and poultry availabilities are expected to moderate any price declines arising from larger beef and veal supplies. Pork output is expected to be down 22 per cent, turkeys minus 3 per cent and broilers up 2 per cent in the second half of 1975. As a result the total United States meat supply is expected to decline by about 4.3 per cent during the last half of this year.
Fed cattle marketings are expected to remain below 60 per cent of total cattle marketings for the rest of 1975. Early summer increases in feed lot placements were not sustained in July after the sharp summer upturn in feedgrain and oilseed meal prices. However, placements were slightly above 1974 for August. Present feed grain price levels are not expected to encourage any major shift in cattle on feed.