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OUTLOOK FOR LIVESTOCK AND POULTRY IN 2025

Michael McConnell
Livestock Analyst
World Agricultural Outlook Board, USDA

Total red meat and poultry production in 2024 increased nearly 1 percent to 107.6 billion pounds, resuming growth after a total production decline occurred in 2023. The increase was due to higher pork and broiler production, as well as flat beef production. These more than offset the declines in turkey production. For 2025, total red meat and poultry production is expected to increase again by 1 percent to 108.4 billion pounds. Lower beef and turkey production are expected to be more than offset by the pork and broiler sectors. Tighter supplies of cattle and resilient demand for beef are expected to support fed steer prices. Hog prices are expected to increase as well, as strong domestic and export demand is expected to carry over from 2024. Broiler prices are forecast to increase, as tighter supplies of beef are expected to support domestic chicken demand. Turkey prices are forecast to rebound in 2025 after two years of price declines that have resulted in reduced production in 2024.

Feed Prices Expected to Decline Again in 2025 and Forage Supplies Continue to Improve

Feed prices are expected to decline in 2025, continuing the trend that began in 2023. Although the 2024/25 marketing year price is lower year over year, corn prices are expected to be relatively flat during calendar year 2025, after prices have increased since the most recent post-harvest period. Soybean meal prices have continued to move lower through the second-half of 2024, which is expected to carry into 2025 with the marketing year price expected to average \$310 per short ton. Hay production and stocks have been steadily recovering from the widespread droughts in 2022 and 2023 that tightened supplies. On farm hay stocks on December 1, 2024 were estimated at 81.5 million tons, an increase of 6 percent from the previous year and an improvement from the recent low of 71.8 million tons on December 1, 2022. Alfalfa hay prices have also been trending lower, with 2023/24 prices declining 18 percent from the previous year and 2024/25 prices continuing to fall through December 2024.

Cattle and Beef

The cattle inventory contracted for the sixth year in 2024. The *Cattle* report estimated the number of cattle and calves on January 1, 2025 at 86.7 million head, marking the lowest level of the national herd since 1951. The latest 1-percent decline marked a lower rate of contraction than recent years, however. The number of cows and heifers that calved was estimated at 37.2 million head, slightly lower than the 37.4 million estimated the previous year. The beef cow herd was estimated nearly 1-percent lower than the previous year at 27.9 million head, the lowest since 1961. The 2024 calf crop was estimated at 33.5 million head, only slightly lower from the previous year's estimate of 33.6 million. The calf crop was relatively large given the fewer number of cows estimated in 2024, suggesting better utilization of the breeding stock and survival rate for calves during 2024.

Although the decline slowed and there was a robust calf crop, the herd is not currently expected to expand in 2025. The number of replacement heifers for the beef herd was 1 percent lower, as strong feeder cattle prices during 2024 incentivize producers to market their heifers, rather than retain them for breeding. Replacement heifers in the dairy herd were also 1 percent lower despite good milk-feed price ratios during 2024, with beef-dairy cross breeding providing dairy producers a strong opportunity to market their calves for the feeder market, as well. With the smaller cow base and strong feeder cattle prices signaling value for future calves, cow slaughter in 2024 fell 15 percent. That trend is expected to continue in 2025, particularly with generally favorable forage conditions at the beginning of the year in many key cow-calf regions. Nonetheless, it will likely take more than the upcoming year for producers to build the breeding herd to the point where herd expansion is realized.

The total number of cattle on feed in U.S. feedlots of all sizes on January 1, 2025, was 14.3 million head, a 1-percent decline from the previous year. High feeder cattle prices encouraged relatively strong feedlot placements through much of 2024. The result is a relatively large share of the cattle herd in feedlots and a smaller pool of cattle available for placements in 2025. The limited number of feeder cattle available and robust demand for fed cattle and beef has resulted in cattle being kept in feedlots for longer periods of time and higher market weights. In 2024, total cattle slaughter was 3 percent lower than in 2023, but average dressed weights increased by 3 percent, in part due to steers and heifers spending more time on feed. As a result, beef production was virtually unchanged from the previous year.

Commercial beef production in 2025 is forecast to decrease nearly 2 percent to 26.6 billion pounds. Tighter domestic feeder supplies are expected to constrain feedlot placements, which will result in lower steer and heifer slaughter. Additionally, the discovery of New World Screwworm (NWS) in Southern Mexico in November 2024 has resulted in new veterinary protocols for cattle entering the United States from Mexico in order to mitigate the risk of NWS spreading into the United States. At the time of the February WASDE release, only two border facilities had been fully certified to follow the protocols, which is expected to slow the rate of cattle imports from Mexico. As a result, fewer cattle imports will further tighten the U.S. feeder cattle market. Finally, average dressed weights are expected to increase in 2025, but at a slower rate than in 2024, as the slaughter mix will be more similar to what occurred in 2024 and there is expected to be less growth in fed steer and heifer market weights.

Beef exports declined 1 percent in 2024 to 3.00 billion pounds. Shipments to some large markets fell, including South Korea, China, and Canada. There were broad year-over-year increases to many mid-sized markets however, reflecting relatively resilient demand for U.S. beef products throughout the world despite higher prices. Beef exports in 2025 are forecast to decrease 7 percent, largely on tighter domestic beef supplies constraining export availability.

Beef imports in 2024 were a record 4.64 billion pounds, an increase of 24 percent. Strong import growth was seen from Australia, New Zealand, Brazil, Uruguay, and Argentina. Tighter beef supplies make the United States an attractive market for exporters, particularly for lean processing beef due to the reduction in cow slaughter. Prices were attractive enough that significant volumes were imported outside tariff-rate quotas (TRQ), particularly from Brazil. For 2025, beef imports are forecast to increase 3 percent to 4.77 billion pounds. Lower cow slaughter will result in continued tight lean

processing beef supplies used in ground beef production and the United States is expected to remain an attractive market for exporters.

The 5-area steer price for 2025 is forecast to average \$201 per cwt, higher than the 2024 average of \$187.12. Tight cattle supplies and strong wholesale beef prices supported prices throughout 2024. Steer prices in early 2025 eclipsed the \$200 per cwt mark for the first time and remained above that level through early February. Feeder cattle prices for 750-800 pound calves in 2025 are forecast to average \$274 per cwt, compared with the 2024 average price of \$251.96. Feeder cattle prices will be supported by the demand for fed cattle and the limited feeder cattle supplies available.

Hogs and Pork

Pork production in 2024 increased 2 percent to 27.8 billion pounds. After poor returns during much of 2023, the hog sector saw improved profitability in 2024 on lower feed costs and higher pork prices for much of the year. Commercial hog slaughter was 1 percent higher than the previous year, and the average dressed weights were a pound heavier. Larger pig crops were the main driver for the higher slaughter levels. While the breeding herd declined during 2024, a 2-percent increase in the litter rate increased the pig crop and supported higher slaughter levels. Commercial pork production for 2025 is forecast to increase 3 percent to 28.5 billion pounds. The December 2024 *Quarterly Hogs and Pigs* report showed that the breeding herd was virtually unchanged from the previous year and that producer farrowing intentions for the first half of 2025 are above 2024 levels. Combined with litter rates that are expected to continue improving—although not to the same magnitude as the year-over-year increases seen in 2023 and 2024- the growth in the domestic pig crop is expected to support the higher commercial slaughter and pork production in 2025.

Pork exports in 2024 increased 4 percent to 7.12 billion pounds. Growth was seen in several key markets, including a 4-percent increase in shipments to Mexico and a 12-percent increase to South Korea. These increases more than offset declines, such as a 2-percent decline to Japan and a 9-percent decline to China. Exports accounted for nearly 26 percent of production in 2024. For 2025, pork exports are forecast to increase 3 percent to 7.30 billion pounds. Increased domestic production and continued strong international demand for pork is expected to support U.S. exports.

Pork imports in 2024 were slightly higher than the previous year, totaling 1.15 billion pounds. Imports from the two largest suppliers, Canada and Mexico, declined from the previous year. This was offset by higher imports from the European Union and Brazil. For 2025, imports are forecast to increase 2 percent to 1.17 billion pounds, reflecting continued demand, particularly for specialty pork products.

National base 51-52% lean hog prices, live equivalent are forecast to average \$65 per cwt in 2025, a 3-percent increase from the 2024 average of \$61.56 per cwt. Despite increased availability of hogs, prices will be supported by strong demand, both domestically and internationally, and higher beef prices.

Sheep and Lamb

The January 1, 2025, *Sheep and Goats* report estimated the total inventory of sheep and lambs at 5.05 million head, up slightly from the 2024 estimate of 5.03 million head. This marked the first year-over-year increase since 2016. The inventory of breeding ewes, rams, and replacement lambs were also

slightly higher or unchanged from the previous year, indicating a relatively stable flock size for the upcoming year. For 2025, commercial lamb and mutton production is forecast to be 134 million pounds, essentially unchanged from 2024.

Lamb and mutton imports increased 28 percent from 2023 levels, totaling 365 million pounds. Australia and New Zealand remain the primary exporters of lamb and mutton to the United States. Lamb and mutton imports in 2025 are forecast at 365 million pounds, essentially flat from 2024 totals, as the U.S. market is expected to remain a relatively attractive market for exporters.

Lamb prices in 2024 began the year above 2023 levels, although they declined in the second half of the year. The slightly larger domestic inventory numbers and stable supplies result in the 2025 National Choice/Prime slaughter lamb price forecast of \$182 per cwt, a 5-percent decline from the 2024 average of \$191.31 per cwt.

Broiler Meat

Broiler meat production in 2024 was 1 percent higher at 46.5 billion pounds. After contracting in the first quarter of the year, production steadily increased for the remainder of the year. Lower feed costs and supportive domestic demand—in part due to higher beef and pork prices—provided incentive for producers to increase production. For 2025, broiler meat production is forecast to increase 1 percent to 47.1 billion pounds on lower feed costs, higher prices for competing meats, and steadily increasing average live bird weights. The rate of growth may be constrained by a layer flock that was 4 percent lower on January 1, 2025, compared with a year ago, as well as hatching rates that continue to recover back to previous historical averages.

U.S. broiler meat exports for 2025 are forecast to decrease 2 percent to 6.61 billion pounds. This comes off the 7 percent decline seen in 2024 exports. Exports in 2024 increased to Mexico, the United States' largest market. This was not enough to offset declines in countries such as Cuba, Taiwan, Philippines, and Guatemala, however. Despite higher supplies, U.S. exports continued to face strong price competition from other major exporters, including the world's largest broiler meat exporter, Brazil.

The National composite wholesale broiler price is forecast to average \$1.32 per pound in 2025. This is a 2-percent increase from 2024, which averaged \$1.29 per pound. Despite increased supplies in 2025, chicken prices are expected to be supported by higher red meat prices and tighter beef supplies.

Turkey

Turkey production for 2025 is forecast to decrease 3 percent to 4.97 billion pounds. Flock depopulations in late-2024 and into early-2025 due to Highly Pathogenic Avian Influenza (HPAI) are expected to continue to constrain production in 2025. Additionally, relatively weak demand for turkey meat has resulted in poor producer returns and lower net placements of birds. The lower placements were particularly pronounced in the spring and summer of 2024, as producers set the stage for production during the holiday season. These factors are expected to continue into 2025 as prices have remained relatively stable through the end of 2024. Eggs in incubators on January 1, 2025 were 1 percent lower than the prior year and 9 percent lower than January 2023. The declines are expected to

be most pronounced in the first half of the year however, as the flock also recovers from the HPAI cases that began to increase in November 2024.

Turkey exports declined 1 percent in 2024, totaling 486 million pounds. Tighter supplies and the relatively stronger dollar were the main drivers behind the slight decline. Exports to Mexico were higher however, with Mexico accounting for 75 percent of total exports. Turkey exports for 2025 are forecast to decrease 4 percent to 465 million pounds due to lower production and less competitive prices.

Wholesale hen prices continued a fairly steep descent from the record highs reached in 2022. The 2024 price averaged 93.7 cents per pound, a 33-percent decline from 2023. The 2025 price forecast is for a 3 percent increase to 97 cents per pound, as reduced domestic production is expected to provide price support, particularly during the peak holiday demand season. Prices will still remain well below the price levels seen between 2020 and 2022.

Eggs

Total U.S. egg production in 2025 is expected to be 8.96 billion dozen, nearly a 1-percent decline from 2024. This outlook is based on the assumption of no additional animal disease outbreaks from what was reported at the time of the WASDE release on February 11, 2025. The egg sector has been contending with large HPAI-related culls through much of the year, but particularly impactful cases have occurred from October 2024 through February 2025. Between October 1, 2024, and February 11, 2025, there have been 44 million commercial table egg layers culled due to HPAI. The culls acutely tightened egg supplies during the winter holiday season and into the beginning of 2025. On January 1, 2025, the table egg laying flock was estimated at 304.3 million birds, a 2-percent decline from the previous year, with subsequent HPAI reports likely further reducing the table egg laying flock. Total egg production is not expected to increase relative to the previous year until the second half of 2025.

In 2024, egg and egg product exports declined 6 percent to 234 million dozen, as high prices and tight supplies constrained exports for both shell eggs and egg products. For 2025, exports are forecast to decline 11 percent due to the continuing tight supply of eggs. In 2024, imports increased 8 percent totaling 29.8 million dozen. Tight supplies are expected to continue to support additional imports, primarily destined for breaking use, in 2025. Imports for 2025 are forecast at 32 million dozen, an increase of 7 percent.

For 2025, New York wholesale egg prices are forecast to average \$4.44 per dozen, compared with the 2024 average of \$3.03. Prices have eclipsed \$8 per dozen early in 2025 as markets contend with recent HPAI cases and the upcoming Easter holiday season. Prices are expected to decline from the current levels in the second quarter and into the second half of the year. However, the rebuilding flock and relatively resilient demand are expected to keep prices above historical averages through the end of the year.

Additional information about the 2025 livestock and poultry outlook is available at:

World Agricultural Outlook Board (WAOB)
[World Agricultural Supply and Demand Estimates](#)

Economic Research Service (ERS)
[Livestock, Dairy, and Poultry Situation and Outlook](#)

Foreign Agricultural Service (FAS)
[Livestock and Poultry: World Markets and Trade](#)