

INTRODUCTION



All Cattle and Calves

As of January 1, 2003, Arkansas' inventory of cattle and calves was 1.85 million head (Table 1). The record for herd size in the state was recorded on January 1, 1975, with a total of 2.68 million head. Milk cow herds set a record of 536,000 head in 1945. Milk cow herd size has dwindled to the present 31,000 head. Cattle production ranks as the third highest income-producing commodity in Arkansas (Figure 1). Cash receipts from the marketing of cattle and calves in the state in 2001 were \$432 million.

Arkansas is a cow-calf state. Most cattle producers are in the business of selling calves from their herd for further growth and finishing in feedlots. A certain portion, about 20 percent, of the calves are kept to replenish the breeding herd, with the remainder shipped to other states for finishing and slaughter. Arkansas' climate and most of its soil and terrain are suited for the production of grass and other forage necessary for this type of cattle production. Many areas in Arkansas are suited for grazing stocker calves on winter pastures of wheat and other cool-season grasses. Stocker cattle are put on pasture to increase size before

placement in feedlots. The stocker calves will eventually go to feedlots in the Plains. Cattle production is a good way to use land not suited for crop production. Arkansas cattle are of the quality and type that have a ready market.

TABLE 1. Beef Cattle Numbers in Arkansas

Year	Total Inventory ¹	Beef Cows ²	Calf Crop ³	Dairy Cows ²
2003	1,850 ⁴	949 ⁴	850 ⁴	31 ⁴
2002	1,820	927	820	33
2001	1,800	923	840	37
2000	1,840	928	850	42
1999	1,820	928	840	42
1998	1,800	919	830	51
1997	1,900	956	870	54
1996	1,910	952	860	58
1995	1,930	969	850	61
1994	1,810	906	790	64

¹All cattle and calves
²Cows and heifers that have calved
³During previous year
⁴Thousand head
 SOURCE: Arkansas Agricultural Statistics Service

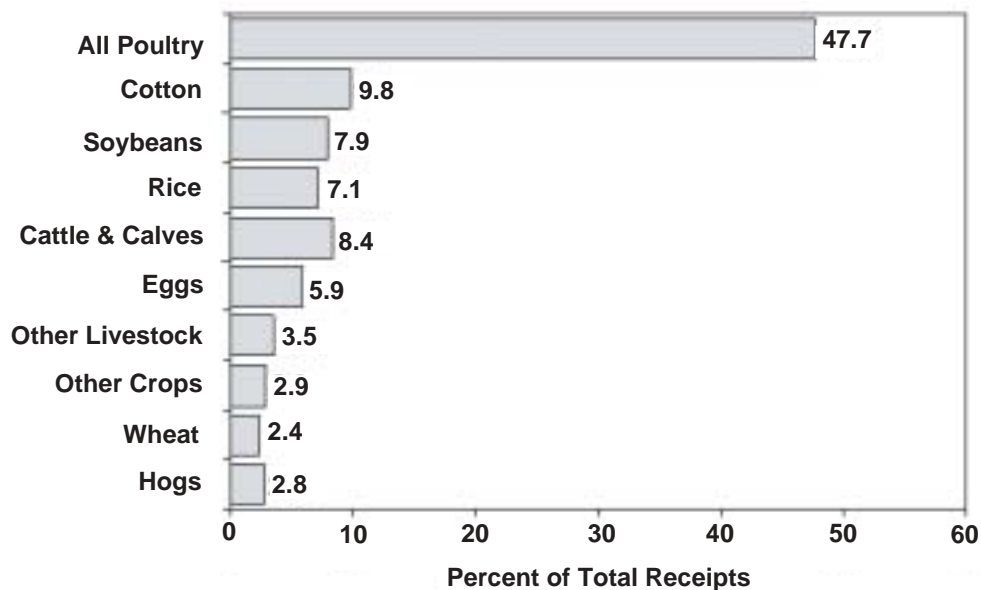


FIGURE 1. Cash receipts in Arkansas – 2001 (as a percent of total receipts).

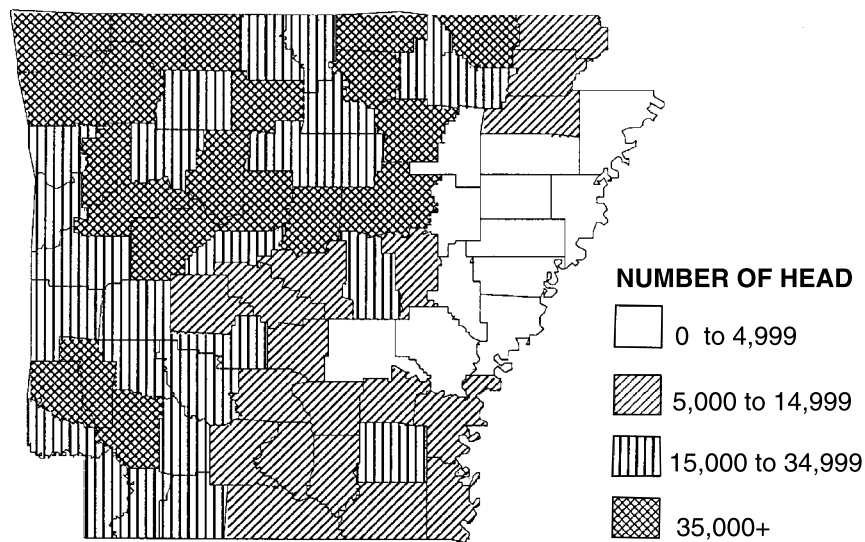
Source: Arkansas Agricultural Statistics Service

Although cattle herds can be found in every county in the state, the greatest concentration of beef cattle production is in the Ozark Mountains of northwest Arkansas (Figure 2). This region accounts for roughly 54 percent of the total beef cow numbers. Washington and Benton Counties are the two largest counties in terms of beef cow numbers, 58,000 and 57,000 head, respectively. The Ouachita Mountain region, in west central and southwest Arkansas, accounts for over 25 percent of the beef cow numbers (Figure 3). These areas provide good pasture growth for native and improved grasses, thanks to the combination of timely rainfall and soil type. Also, these areas produce the hay needed for feeding cattle during the winter months when pastures are dormant.

Raising cattle lends itself well to other agricultural enterprises. Poultry production and beef cattle fit well together on the same operation. Poultry production, especially broilers, requires small amounts of land for production facilities but requires a method of waste product disposal. Cattle production requires land, which can be around and among poultry facilities, and the land benefits from waste products of the poultry enterprise as pasture fertilizer. These enterprises complement each other in labor requirements. Labor is not intensive on a continual basis for each enterprise.

Arkansas produces a wide diversity of breeds of cattle. These include traditional European breeds: Hereford, Angus and Shorthorn; the Indian breed: Brahman; the Exotic: Charolais, Limousin, Simmental, etc.; and the U.S. breeds: Santa Gertrudis, Beefmaster and Longhorn. There is no perfect breed for the state. Selection of breed is based on personal preference, environmental conditions, adaptability, longevity, reproductive efficiency, milking ability, size, ability to gain weight and other traits that fit personal preferences. All of these breeds, as well as commercial-type cattle, thrive in the hospitable climate of Arkansas. Commercial cattle are mixtures of two or more of pure breeds of cattle. Each breed in the combination is selected for certain traits, e.g., a Hereford and Brahman cross is used in the more humid areas of the state. Brahman adapts well to heat, and Hereford is used to maintain carcass quality and feed conversion.

Cattle production continues to be a flourishing enterprise in the state. Improvements in the production of cattle, pastures and marketing ensure that this enterprise continues to be a major part of Arkansas agriculture.



**FIGURE 2. Cattle and calves on Arkansas farms.
January 1, 1997**

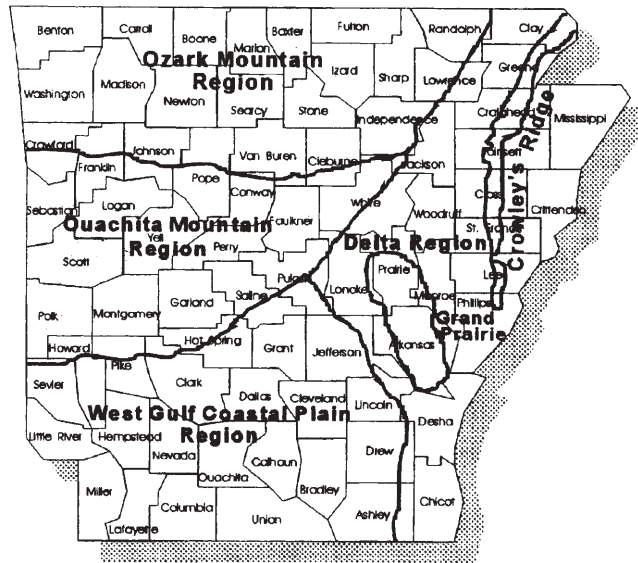


FIGURE 3. Geological regions of Arkansas.

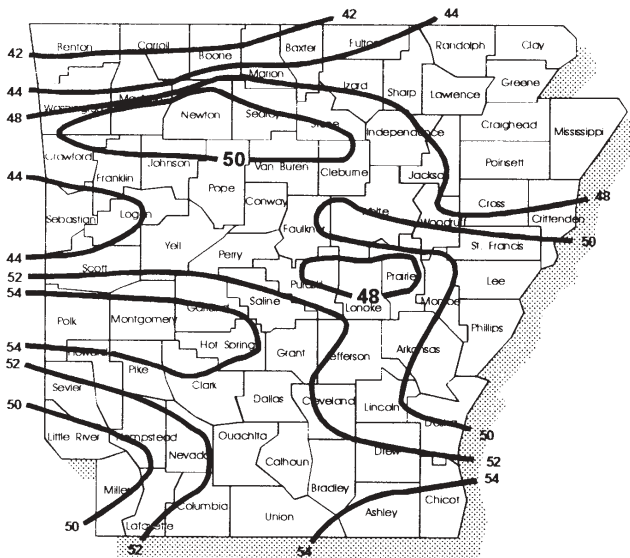


FIGURE 4. Mean annual precipitation (inches).

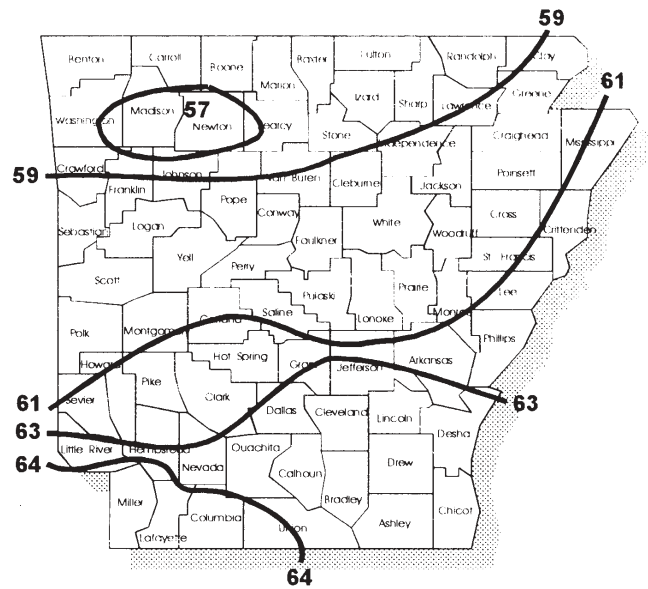


FIGURE 5. Annual mean temperature (°F).