



## **2024 Contribution of the Washington Beef Sector<sup>1</sup>**

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### ***2024 Industry Structure, Trends and Economic Linkages***

The beef industry is a key pillar of Washington State's agricultural economy, supporting rural communities and related industries. The industry is comprised of cow-calf ranching, feedlot operations, and beef processing, with each sector contributing distinct value to the state's economy. Washington's beef industry continues to generate substantial economic activity, supported by strong consumer demand, competitive feed advantages, and a stable beef processing sector.

This fact sheet summarizes key findings from a comprehensive analysis of Washington's beef industry, including long-run inventory trends, sectoral structure, price dynamics, and the industry's total economic contribution to the state's economy using data representing 2024.

Washington's beef industry is characterized by a connected supply chain linking cow-calf producers, feedlots, and beef processors. While the state has a smaller beef cow inventory compared to neighboring states, it plays large roles in cattle feeding and beef processing.

In 2024, modeled cattle production inventories based on USDA data show that Washington produced approximately:

- 223,000 calves
- 431,000 finished feedlot steers and heifers marketed for slaughter
- 1,043,000 head of cattle slaughtered

This supply chain between calves produced, cattle finished in feedlots, and cattle slaughtered highlights Washington's role as a major importer of both feeder cattle and finished cattle. Each stage of production adds economic value, magnifying the total contribution of the beef industry to the state economy. The expansion of beef-on-dairy crossbreeding contributed to the 2024 supply inventory for feedlots and cattle slaughtered. Data is not available to specifically identify the supply impact from beef on dairy animals.

Washington has shown more resiliency in beef cow inventory when compared to national and larger beef cow states. From 2020 through 2024, Washington's beef cow herd size decreased 8 percent compared to 11 percent nationally and Washington has lower year to year variability in beef cow inventory compared to major beef producing states.

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Since the previous 2019 economic contribution study, cattle prices have increased sharply, reaching record-high nominal levels in 2023, 2024 and 2025. Prices exceeded the previous highs observed in early 2015, driven by tightening national beef supplies and sustained consumer demand for beef. The change in value per head from 2020 to 2024, varied across the supply chain.

- Cow-calf producers: 82 percent increase in value (price x weight sold) per head
- Feedlot finished cattle: 74 percent increase in value per head
- Packer boxed beef cutout: 30 percent increase in value per head

Cow-calf producers experienced the largest gains, reflecting strong feeder cattle demand in a period of declining inventories. These record high beef price trends have helped offset declining cattle numbers and supported growth in sales value across the industry.

Washington's beef processing sector is the largest economic sector of the state's cattle industry. Packers serve as the primary market outlet for feedlots, while feedlots, in turn, provide the key outlet for cow-calf producers. Since 2007, the number of cattle slaughtered in Washington has remained relatively stable, reflecting efficient utilization of packing plant capacity. This stability has provided consistent market access for feedlots and contributed to confidence across the supply chain. Washington's position as a major beef-processing state depends heavily on imported cattle, reinforcing the interconnected nature of the beef industry.

### ***2024 Washington Beef Industry Economic Contributions***

The input-output economic model used in this analysis came from the IMPLAN software model and incorporated Washington beef sector survey data collected for this study. The contribution of the industry to the Washington economy is measured by different types of impact: direct effects measuring the immediate effects related to the production and processing of cattle; indirect effects, changes arising from inter-industry transactions as supplying industries respond to the demand from the directly affected industry; and induced effects, the effects due to the local spending on goods and services by employees in the directly and indirectly affected industry sectors. Table 1 shows these effects measured in terms of sales transactions, value added, income, and full-time equivalent employment.

**Table 1: Beef Sector Economic Contributions**

<b>Cow-Calf</b>	<b>Sales</b>	<b>Value Added</b>	<b>Income</b>	<b>Jobs</b>
Direct	\$329,930,801	\$169,684,896	\$128,863,170	2,683
Indirect	\$205,887,395	\$111,107,917	\$79,538,236	969
Induced	\$33,023,931	\$21,933,114	\$10,618,702	137
<b>Total</b>	<b>\$568,842,127</b>	<b>\$302,725,927</b>	<b>\$219,020,108</b>	<b>3,788</b>

  

<b>Feedlots</b>	<b>Sales</b>	<b>Value Added</b>	<b>Income</b>	<b>Jobs</b>
Direct	\$621,143,371	\$42,702,278	\$36,115,841	717
Indirect	\$606,675,553	\$243,677,972	\$174,340,366	1,656
Induced	\$104,544,003	\$69,434,587	\$33,660,692	434
<b>Total</b>	<b>\$1,332,362,927</b>	<b>\$355,814,837</b>	<b>\$244,116,900</b>	<b>2,807</b>

  

<b>Processors</b>	<b>Sales</b>	<b>Value Added</b>	<b>Income</b>	<b>Jobs</b>
Direct	\$2,175,197,582	\$297,058,939	\$223,430,184	3,015
Indirect	\$1,128,750,811	\$699,226,497	\$561,656,836	4,894
Induced	\$640,900,953	\$425,677,768	\$206,481,694	2,667
<b>Total</b>	<b>\$3,944,849,346</b>	<b>\$1,421,963,204</b>	<b>\$991,568,714</b>	<b>10,577</b>

  

<b>Total</b>	<b>Sales</b>	<b>Value Added</b>	<b>Income</b>	<b>Jobs</b>
Direct	\$3,126,271,755	\$509,446,113	\$388,409,195	6,414
Indirect	\$1,941,313,759	\$1,054,012,386	\$815,535,438	7,520
Induced	\$778,468,886	\$517,045,469	\$250,761,088	3,238
<b>Total</b>	<b>\$5,846,054,400</b>	<b>\$2,080,503,968</b>	<b>\$1,454,705,722</b>	<b>17,172</b>

The total sales stemming from the beef industry amounted to \$5.85 billion. Sales values reported for the beef sector represent gross transaction activity at each stage of the supply chain and accounted for intermediate purchases between cow-calf, feedlot, and processing operations. While these sales figures are useful for illustrating the overall scale of market activity associated with the beef industry, they do not represent the net economic contribution to Washington's economy. To avoid double counting the value of a beef animal in a coordinated supply chain when estimating economic contributions, this study reports the value added (gross state product). The value added contributions reflect the net economic activity generated within Washington by the beef industry.

In 2024 the **value added (gross state product) generated by Washington beef industry amounted to \$2.08 billion**. Roughly 14.6% of the value added were attributed to cow-calf operations, 17.1% were attributed to feedlots and 68.3% were attributed to beef processing. Incomes supported by the beef industry were \$1.45 billion reflecting income received in the form of salaries, wages, and benefits, as well as proprietor earnings. This income supported 17,172 full time equivalent jobs within the state.

## Key Takeaways

- Washington's beef industry remains a major economic contributor to the state's economy.
- By utilizing feedstuffs such as potato and apple processing byproducts, corn silage, and hay, Washington's beef industry provides a vital market outlet and industrial symbiosis for several state commodities.
- Strong cattle prices in 2023 and 2024 helped offset reduced cattle numbers and supported growth in sales value.
- The state's comparative advantages in feeding and processing magnify economic contributions beyond what cow-calf production alone would suggest.
- Beef processing anchors the entire supply chain, providing stable market access and substantial employment.
- The Pacific Northwest region has a combined inventory of over one million dairy cows that significantly contributes to beef on dairy crossbreeds to Washington's beef supply chain. Data is not reported to calculate specific inventory numbers.
- The beef industry **generated \$2.08 billion in total value added** and **supported over 17,000** jobs in Washington in 2024.