



## THE LARCH COMPANY

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TO: Interested Parties  
FROM: Andy Kerr  
RE: No Need to Graze Livestock on Federal Public Lands  
DATE: 6 August 2021

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Grazing on federal public lands contributes so little to feeding our nation's cattle and sheep that were all such grazing discontinued, the market would quickly adjust to replace the very small loss in forage and feed supply that comes from Bureau of Land Management and Forest Service lands. Consider the numbers:

- 41 percent of all US lands are dedicated to pasture/range and the production of livestock feed; 31.6 percent of these lands are federal public lands (Bureau of Land Management and the Forest Service).
- These federal public lands produce 1.3 percent of the US feed and forage supply for cattle and sheep.
- Only 2.2 percent of US farms/ranches graze their livestock on federal public lands for any part of the year.
- Plenty of private farmland exists to absorb the contribution to feeding the nation's cattle and sheep that grazing on federal public lands currently makes.

Below is the documentation for these numbers.

### **Lands Dedicated to the Production of Livestock**

*In the contiguous United States.* According to *Bloomberg*, a total of 781.4 million acres—or 41 percent—of the lower forty-eight states are dedicated to the production of livestock. Of these, 654 million acres are pasture/range and 127.4 million acres are used for growing livestock feed crops<sup>1</sup> (see Figure 1).

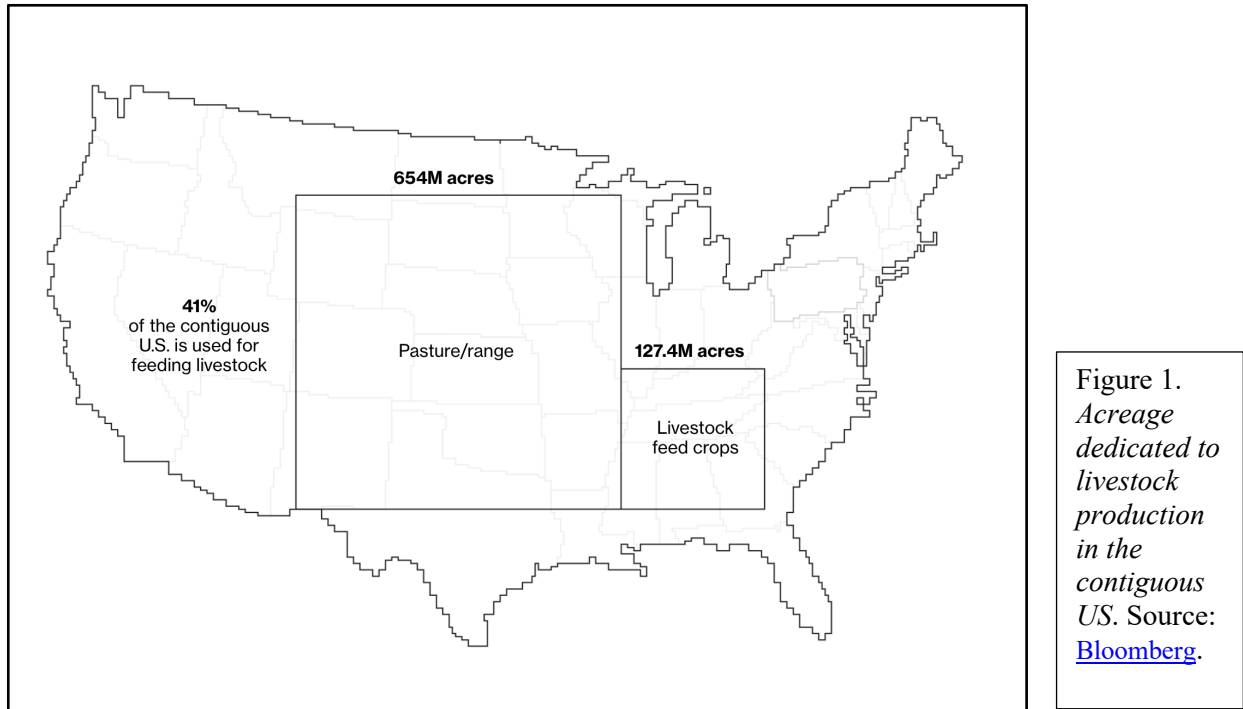
*On federal public lands.* According to the Congressional Research Service, 247.1 million acres of federal public lands are available for domestic livestock grazing (154.1 and 93 million acres respectively for the Bureau of Land Management and the Forest Service).<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Dave Merrill and Lauren Leatherby, "[Here's How America Uses Its Land](#)," *Bloomberg*, July 31, 2018.

<sup>2</sup> Carol Hardy Vincent, "[Grazing Fees: Overview and Issues](#)," Congressional Research Service (RS12132), March 4, 2019.

Doing the arithmetic.  $247.1 \text{ million acres} \div 781.4 \text{ million acres} \times 100 = 31.6\%$



### Cattle and Sheep Feed and Forage

*In the contiguous United States.* According to the USDA National Agricultural Statistics Service, the nation has 101 million head of cattle<sup>3</sup> and 5.2 million head of sheep.<sup>4</sup> According to Webster's, "a unit expressing the feed requirements of different kinds of domestic animals on a common scale usually based on the average or theoretical requirements of a mature cow"<sup>5</sup> is called an *animal unit* (AU). One mature sheep eats 0.2 times as much as one mature cow—in other words, as five sheep eat as much as one cow, there are five sheep per animal unit. The total number of animal units (AUs) of feed and forage required by US cattle and sheep is 102,034,000 million.

*On federal public lands.* According to the Congressional Research Service, the total number of authorized animal unit months (AUMs; there are 12 AUMs in an AU) on federal public lands is 15,624,042 (8,820,617 on BLM lands and 6,803,425 on Forest Service lands respectively).<sup>6</sup>

Doing the arithmetic.  $(15,624,042 \text{ AUMs} \div 12) \div 102,034,000 \text{ AUs} \times 100 = 1.3\%$

### Number of Cattle and Sheep Operations

*In the contiguous United States.* According to the Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service, 913,246 farms and ranches produced cattle and calves and 88,338 operations produced sheep in 2017, for a total of 1,001,584 farms and ranches.<sup>7</sup> The total assumes no overlap, but some operations undoubtedly produce both cattle and sheep.

<sup>3</sup> Terry Matlock, "[United States Cattle Inventory Down 1 Percent](#)," USDA National Agricultural Statistics Service, July 23, 2021.

<sup>4</sup> USDA National Agricultural Statistics Service, "[Sheep and Goats](#)," January 29, 2021.

<sup>5</sup> Merriam-Webster. "[Animal Unit](#)" (webpage).

<sup>6</sup> Vincent, "Grazing Fees."

<sup>7</sup> USDA Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service, "[Overview of U.S. Livestock, Poultry, and Aquaculture Production in 2017](#)," 2018.

*On federal public lands.* According to the Congressional Research Service, a total of 24,032 permittees and/or lessees hold federal grazing permits (16,357 BLM and 5,725 USFS).<sup>8</sup> The total does not account for overlap where a permittee and/or lessee holds both BLM and USFS permits.

*Doing the arithmetic.*  $24,032 \div 1,001,584 \times 100 = 2.2\%$

### Final Observations

**1. Even in the West, it's not that much.** Even if one considers only the eleven contiguous western states where most livestock grazing on federal lands occurs, federal forage contributes only 4 percent and 9 percent for cattle and sheep, respectively.<sup>9</sup> Although a vast amount of federal public land has livestock grazing on it in the West, almost all livestock production is on private lands.

**2. Any slack can be taken up by nonfederal lands.** The total contribution of federal public lands to the national forage and feed supply (1.3 million AUs [or "head"]) is well within periodic fluctuations of US cattle and sheep inventory (see Figure 2). The market would adjust if all public lands grazing were ended.

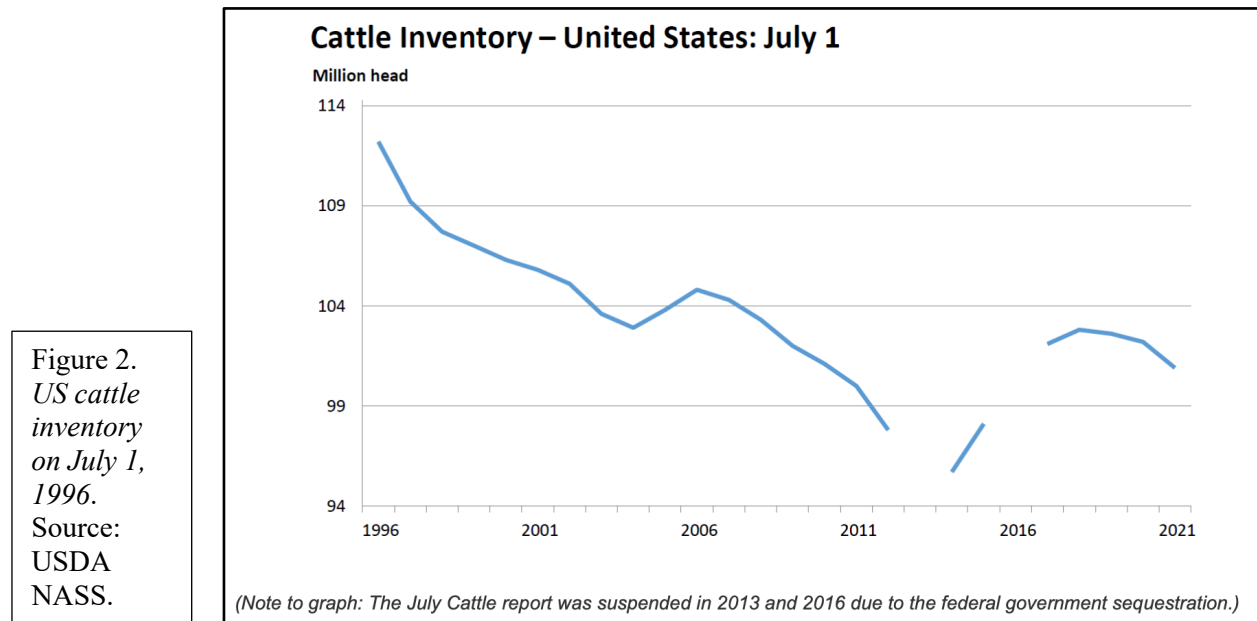
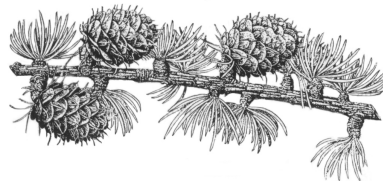


Figure 2.  
US cattle  
inventory  
on July 1,  
1996.

Source:  
USDA  
NASS.



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<sup>8</sup> Vincent, "Grazing Fees."

<sup>9</sup> Neil R. Rimbey, John A. Tanaka, and L. Allen Torell, "[Economic Considerations of Livestock Grazing on Public Lands in the United States of America](#)," *Animal Frontiers* 5, issue 4 (October 2015): 32–35.