

# Western Livestock Slaughter

## California producers gain by increased Western demand caused by population growth and high spendable income

Edwin C. Voorhies

**California livestock** producers are in a favorable economic position.

Two factors influenced trends in livestock slaughter during the past 25 years. One was the 150% or more increase in the human population of California—120% in the three Pacific Coast states—the other factor was the high level of the spendable—after taxes—income per capita.

Some of the slaughter shifts were examined in a study recently completed by the agricultural experiment stations of the 11 western states and Texas.

### Slaughter Shifts

Among the most striking changes is the increase in slaughter by western packing plants—particularly on the Pacific Coast—from approximately three billion pounds liveweight in 1925 to about six billion pounds in 1948. Slaughter in plants in the remaining 36 states went up about 20% during the same period.

An important part in the increase in commercial slaughter in the western states was played by the plentiful supplies of live animals throughout the West. Since 1925 the tendency has been for more livestock of certain classes to be slaughtered at western interior towns and cities at some distance from the larger western cities with their public and terminal markets. This decentralization of packing plants has increased the percentage of the total slaughter handled by established packing houses.

### Increased Demand

A substantial portion of western meat-animal production formerly moved to the Corn Belt as feeder stock prior to fattening. Slaughter and ultimate consumption took place in the eastern part of the United States. For the past 25 years an increasing share of western marketings has been going to supply western slaughterers.

An average net surplus of 2.5 billion pounds of all classes of live animals was marketed from the combined 11 western states and Texas in recent years as compared with 3.3 billion pounds during 1925-27.

As the demand for livestock to be slaughtered in the West increased, and western livestock numbers for shipments to other parts of the United States de-

creased, the line of east-west movement—the approximate geographical boundary to which western packer-buyers need to come from coastal points to buy their supplies of slaughter livestock—gradually moved eastward.

This increase in western demand for western meat animals means that livestock formerly available for consumption in the East is now utilized in the local area. Western stockmen are finding it possible to sell a larger part of their yearly output of meat animals nearer their own farms and ranches.

### Outlook

It seems that the human population of the West will increase to approximately 30 million people by 1955. If this increase materializes, and the western per capita consumption of meat in 1955 is equal to that of 1948, the West will require about 1,200,000,000 more pounds of liveweight of meat animals. This additional demand could be supplied from slaughter in the West or from inshipment, or from some combination of the two.

If all the meat to supply this demand were to come from the West, a western slaughter of 7,200,000,000 pounds would be required by 1955. This apparently needed increase of 1,200,000,000 pounds, when expressed in terms of head count, is the equivalent of about 800,000 cattle, 375,000 calves, 1,100,000 hogs and 1,000,000 sheep.

### Surplus Areas

Taking the 12 western states—including Texas—as an entity, the area has been and still is a major surplus-marketing area for both cattle and sheep. Because of this, the eastern markets are still a major price-determining influence for livestock sold by western stockmen.

Within this western region, the Pacific Coast is predominately a deficit area—slaughter is greater than net marketings—in production and marketing livestock.

If the western states of Oregon, Idaho, Nevada, Utah, and Arizona, were to ship their combined surpluses into California, this state would still be in a deficit position of some 200 million pounds of meat.

The degree of surplus or deficit exist-

ing for the several classes of livestock have varied from a net deficit of 640 million pounds of hogs to a net surplus of 2.4 billion pounds of cattle and calves and 731 million pounds of sheep.

Seasonal variation in the number of animals and in the pounds of western commercial livestock slaughtered is different for the four classes of animals studied. Less seasonal variation is noted when the poundage of all meat animals is grouped and considered as a single unit. Western commercial slaughter of hogs and calves shows the greatest degree of seasonal change; slaughter of cattle shows the least. The heaviest volume of hog slaughter tends to occur in months when slaughtering is low for other meat animals.

Regardless of the extent of surplus or deficit existing for the several species of livestock, the demands for livestock for slaughter are developing at a more rapid rate than the ability of western ranchers to increase the production of these animals. Range operators who have customarily produced feeder cattle and sheep for sale in the East may find it more profitable in the future to investigate the possibilities of putting additional finish on their animals for sale to western buyers.

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