

AGRICULTURE

Golden Plains Area Newsletter

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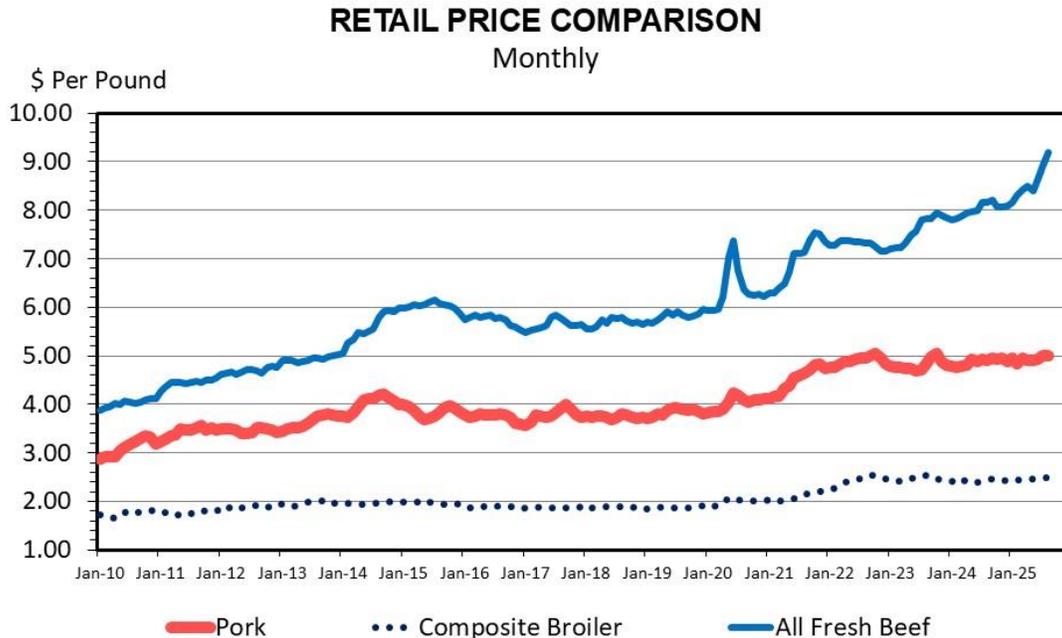
GOLDEN PLAINS AREA
COLORADO STATE UNIVERSITY
EXTENSION

Colorado State University, U.S. Department of Agriculture and Kit Carson, Phillips, Sedgwick, Washington, and Yuma Counties cooperating.

Extension programs are available to all without discrimination.

AG BUSINESS

Retail Meat Prices Still Increasing Livestock Marketing Information Center



Data Source: Bureau of Labor Statistics & USDA-ERS
Livestock Marketing Information Center

Trends...RETAIL MEAT PRICES CONTINUE TO CLIMB Retail meat prices for August were released on September 11, 2025 by the USDA Economic Research Service. Heading into the Labor Day weekend, all-fresh beef averaged \$9.18 per pound, pork was \$5.00 per pound, and the broiler composite was \$2.49 per pound corresponding to year-over-year increases of +12.6%, +2.2%, and +1.9%, respectively. On the beef side, August strength was driven by broad gains across major cuts. Increases were particularly notable for sirloin steaks (+24.1% to \$14.32 per lb.) and boneless stew beef (+20.8% to \$8.82 per lb.), while other major cuts posted year-over-year increases of +10.3% to +15%. All uncooked ground beef rose +13% to \$6.63 per pound.

In pork, gains were not universal. Bacon and boneless chops led the composite rate higher, with sliced bacon increasing +6.2% to \$7.21 per pound, and boneless chops rising +1.4% to \$4.69 per pound. By contrast, all pork chops and boneless hams declined year-over-year by -2.4% and -3.6% to \$4.29 and \$5.43 per pound, respectively.

Poultry prices were mixed. Fresh whole chicken and boneless breasts increased +4.4% and +6.6% to \$2.08 and \$4.21 per pound, while bone-in legs fell -2.1% to \$1.79 per pound. Dairy prices saw broad increases. Fresh whole milk rose +3.1% to \$4.17 per gallon and processed American cheese and natural cheddar increased +3.4% and +6.2% to \$5.01 and \$6.12 per pound, respectively.

AGRONOMY

Beneficial Bug Baler Project **Ron Meyer, Area Agronomy Specialist**

! Wheat Stem Sawfly is becoming a serious pest issue for Colorado's wheat producers. Estimated wheat losses now top more than \$33 million per year in the state. Colorado State University (CSU) is actively engaged in pest control strategies with this insect. Currently, there are semi-solid stemmed wheat varieties released, which limit yield losses for Colorado wheat producers. Wheat varieties such as Amplify SF along with private company varieties limit losses from this pest.

In addition, wheat stem sawfly insect natural enemy predators have been discovered. These predators lay eggs on sawfly larvae and control them. The issue is, Colorado has low populations of sawfly insect predators. Therefore, in an effort to increase natural enemies of wheat stem sawfly, CSU researchers are importing predators from other areas. The Beneficial Bug Baler Project is designed to import beneficial insects to help mitigate the pest.

Wheat straw containing beneficial insects is being baled and transported to the CSU research station located in Akron, Colorado. Bales are rolled out and beneficial insects are allowed to reproduce on wheat test plots at this location. The hope is that the beneficial insects will thrive, and this population can then be relocated to high sawfly infestation areas within northeast Colorado. This pest management tool, along with semi-solid stemmed wheat varieties, is expected to greatly reduce the wheat stem sawfly threat to Colorado wheat producers without applying insecticides.

Save the Date!

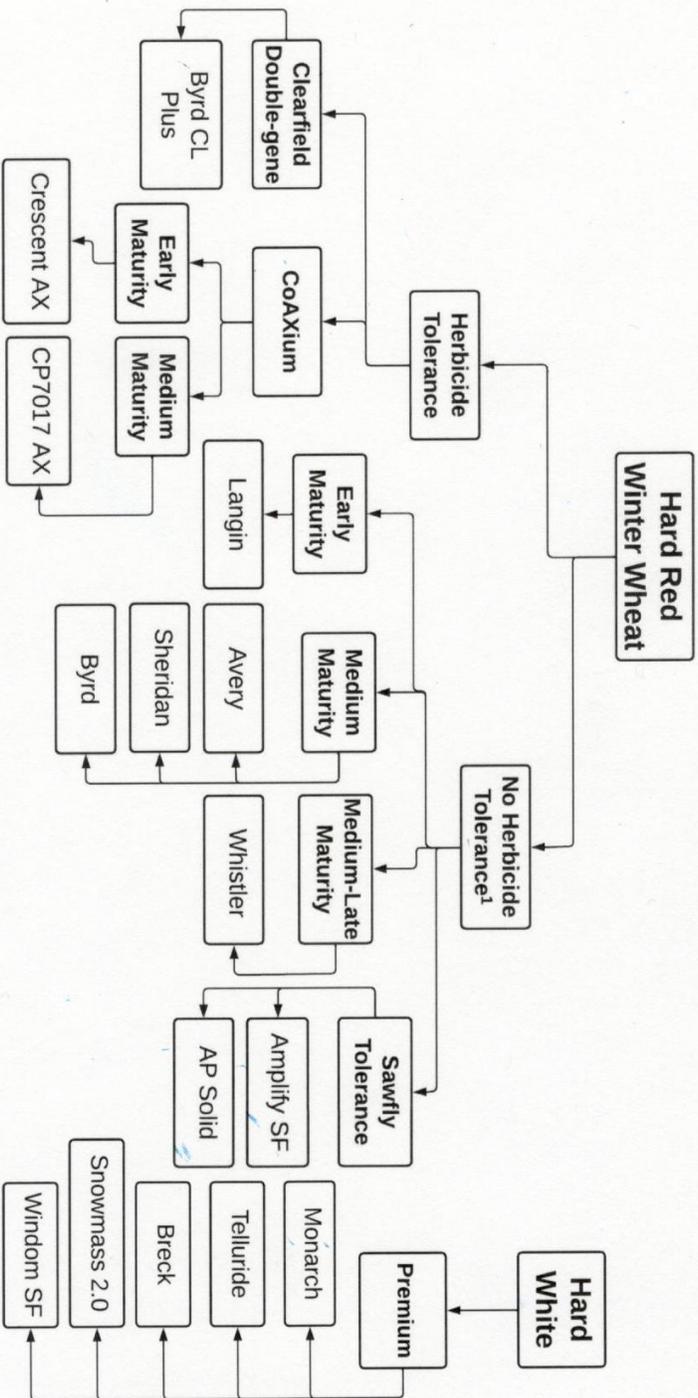
2025 CSU Crops Clinic will be held December 8 & 9.

Location: TBD. In-person and hybrid planned. Approximately 14 CCA Credits will be offered.

Wheat Decision Tree **Sally Jones-Diamond, Crops Testing Specialist**

The following page contains a decision tree for fall dryland wheat developed by Colorado State University's crops testing program. This information is based on three years of trials and ranked according to the yield when multiple varieties are given.

Fall 2025 CSU Dryland Wheat Decision Tree



¹No tolerance to herbicides used in Clearfield or CoAXium wheat production systems. In categories with two or more varieties, they are listed from highest to lowest yield based on the 3-year CSU trial averages.

LIVESTOCK



Is Preconditioning Calves in a High Market Still Worth It **Scott Stinnett, 4-H Youth and Livestock Specialist**

With historically high cattle prices, some producers are considering skipping preconditioning calves. They cite saving labor and feed costs as the main reasons compared to the price they are currently receiving. Data would say this is not the best idea.

Preconditioning, which includes weaning, vaccination and introduction to nutrient dense feeds, prepares calves to move into the next stage of production. The advantage for the buyer is calves are better prepared to meet the stresses of the next production stage. Most buyers are willing to pay for this preparation as they will see better gains, better health and less death loss compared to calves who are not preconditioned.

Looking at death loss, members of the Texas Cattle Feeders Association responded to a survey which revealed a 1.5% death loss in preconditioned calves versus 4.3% death loss in calves not preconditioned. That is nearly 3 times more calves lost. In economic terms, if we use 600-pound calves as our example with a current price around \$370 cwt, each calf is worth \$2,200 to \$2,500. A feeder losing 1.5 calves is a loss of approximately \$3,300 to \$3,700 per 100 head. The death loss of 4.3% dramatically increase to \$9,500 to \$10,750 per 100 head.

Preconditioned calves tend to gain better. Studies have shown consistently that preconditioned calves will gain .2 to .3 pounds per day more than calves not preconditioned. Over 180 days that equals an extra 36 to 54 pounds of weight gain. Assuming current prices hold of \$240 for fed cattle, it could mean an extra \$85 to \$130 per head.

This difference in death loss and weight gain allows buyers to reward producers for preconditioning. According to the Oklahoma Beef Quality Network (OBQN), a joint project of the Oklahoma Cooperative Extension Service and the Oklahoma Cattlemen's Association (OCA), following a OBQN preconditioning program resulted in premiums paid over \$20 cwt in 2023 and 2024. With current 600-pound calves being marketed around \$370 cwt, a premium of \$20 to even \$30 cwt is not out of the realm of possibility for preconditioned calves. This could equate to an additional \$100 to \$200 per head for preconditioning.

The argument for continuing to precondition calves still holds even in a high cattle market. Premiums will still be paid to ensure calves are fully prepared for the next stage of production. Preconditioning adds value to the buyer and rewards the producer for the added value.



Investing Pre-tax Profit during Record Prices Travis Taylor, Area Livestock Specialist

Record calf prices over the past two years have provided cow-calf producers with the opportunity to reinvest in their operations. **Brock Ortner with University of Nebraska Extension** warns against the temptation to spend pretax earnings on items that may not enhance operational efficiency or performance in future years. *“This cattle cycle is unique in many respects. Contributing factors include sustained drought in key production regions, historically high calf and cull-cow prices, an aging producer base, and a severely reduced national cow herd inventory. As history reminds us — such as the sharp drop in feeder-calf prices in 2016 — periods of high income require careful, strategic decision-making to ensure long-term business success.”*

It is common for many producers to meet with the tax accountant prior to the end of the year, and producers are always looking for ways to reduce the “tax debt.” It is important to remember that tax accounting and business profitability while related are not the same. Tax accounting focuses are reducing an operator’s liability by utilizing deductions and depreciation. Ortner warns that this strategy can be valid, but decisions based solely on minimizing tax liability may not support the long-term financial health of the ranch. For example, purchasing a new pickup or piece of equipment before the end of the year may reduce tax exposure, but each investment should be evaluated on whether they contribute meaningfully to the business’s efficiency or profitability.

An operation’s economic profit includes the fair market value of owned inputs such as raised feed, land use and unpaid family labor. It also accounts for depreciation or replacement cost of breeding animals and applies an opportunity cost to owned assets. This forces management to recognize that capital tied up in assets like equipment or land could otherwise be earning a return through low-risk investments.

Each pre-tax investment should be evaluated on the ability to increase gross margin, which is revenue minus direct costs. Investments in machinery or equipment may be needed, however what such investments can add to overhead and actual costs in depreciation and maintenance can decrease overall profitability. It may be necessary to replace a tractor that is eating away at profit through repair and maintenance costs, but the extra overhead, maintenance cost and realized depreciation can decrease actual profit. Ortner suggests pre-tax investments like cross fencing, improved water infrastructure, or rotational grazing systems can improve forage utilization, enabling greater production without increasing land base — ultimately improving gross margin.

Additionally, Ortner suggests that another valuable use of pretax earnings is to improve the ranch’s current asset position: liquid assets that can be easily converted to cash. Examples include backgrounding calves, purchasing stockers for grazing, or simply retaining cash in savings or a low-risk investment account. While income taxes will be owed on retained cash, having a strong liquidity position can help service existing debt, buffer against future volatility, or enable the operation to seize future unseen opportunities. In many cases, paying taxes is a sign of profitability, and retaining earnings for strategic flexibility can be more valuable than chasing deductions.

For those producers who still need to decrease their tax liability there are new tax laws that may help. In January 2025, bonus depreciation went from 40% to 100% on the purchase price of assets with a useful life of 20 years or less. Additionally, producers may take advantage of a Section 179 election. This rule works like depreciation and will allow a deduction up to 2.5 million. However, unlike bonus depreciation, it only offsets farm or business income and furthermore cannot create an income loss. It is important to visit early with your tax professional to ensure that you are making a tax plan that is right for you.

Reinvesting pretax earnings during a strong market can either strengthen or strain the operation. Evaluating decisions through an economic lens and not solely on reducing tax burden. Producers should view that as an opportunity to invest in making sure the operation is profitable for the long haul. As Ortner stated “the current cattle market provides a rare opportunity to build resilience in cow-calf operations, but doing so requires strategic planning and disciplined evaluation of where and how dollars are invested”.

HORTICULTURE

Windbreak Trees **Linda Langelo, CSU Horticulture Specialist**

Windbreak trees serve as an important feature of the landscape on the Eastern Plains. Their purpose is to slow down the wind speed and redirect it. Windbreaks serve other purposes, including crop protection, capturing snow, providing shade and protection for livestock, and serving as habitat for other animals.

These days, windbreaks are having their health issues. Drought years have affected trees such as Colorado Blue Spruce and Austrian Pines that are used in areawide windbreaks. If we have a summer with extended periods of high temperatures and no precipitation, these two species are the first to experience dieback or not recover from the season. First, Colorado Blue Spruce prefers humid, cooler climates. Its ideal high temperature is 75 degrees Fahrenheit, which helps keep the tree in good health by being in an environment for good growth. These trees are out of their normal range. But they have adapted to our climate until it becomes too extreme.

Austrian pines have originated from Southern Europe, from mountain ranges to coastal areas. They are very adaptable and resilient. They prefer colder climates. They are also used to heavy snows in the winter, which helps make them more resilient in the summer season. Our prolonged droughts with no snow cover over the winter have created a stressful condition for Austrian Pines.

According to the Kansas Farmer Magazine, Editor Jennifer M. Latzke in 2022 said, “The Great Plains Initiative reports that over half of windbreaks in Kansas, Nebraska, and the Dakotas are waning.” In the article, she did not state why. Here is a link to the article:

<https://www.farmprogress.com/conservation-and-sustainability/great-plains-windbreaks-in-decline>

One of the major reasons is that the trees in the windbreaks are aging out or have reached their maturity since 1930's when they were introduced during the Dust Bowl. This is what is happening in our rural towns. Renovating the windbreak is key. As we age, so do our trees.

Other issues are conflicts with farming practices that drive windbreak removal. The cost of managing the windbreaks is an issue. This can increase the poor condition of a windbreak. Therefore, climate issues are only one factor in the decline of a windbreak.

There are grants through the Conservation Districts for producers to help renovate their windbreaks. I would recommend that for new plantings to place the trees further than 15 feet apart, giving the root system a place to expand without competing with the next tree, and giving each tree proper sunlight before growing into each other.

Ag Workforce Intern Program

Sam Hahn, CDA Next Generation & Specialty Crop Programs Manager

CDA is opening applications for the [Ag Workforce Development Program](#) on October 1, 2025.

This program provides financial incentives to Colorado farms, ranches, and other agricultural businesses to hire interns and provide them with hands-on training. Businesses can apply for 1-3 internships per year and be reimbursed for 50% of the actual costs to employ each intern (up to \$5,000 per intern). Internships must be an educational experience of at least 130 hours. Interns must be a student, recent graduate, or a beginning farmer or rancher, and cannot be a current or past employee or a relative of the business owner.

Businesses apply to CDA for funding and hire interns through their normal hiring process. Prospective interns apply to the business, not CDA.

This year's application period is **October 1-31, 2025** for internships taking place in 2026. Businesses can apply through the online form available on the CDA website (ag.colorado.gov/awdp).



The Agricultural Workforce Development Program helps ag businesses hire interns—and gives future farmers and ranchers the hands-on training they need to launch a career.

Are you a Colorado Farm, Ranch or Agricultural Business?

Receive Financial Support. Get reimbursed up to 50% of intern wages (up to \$5,000).

Enhance your Business. Bring new talent and fresh perspectives to your operations.

Invest in the Future. Provide valuable, hands-on training and mentorship to future agriculture professionals.

**Businesses get paid.
Interns get trained.**



Learn more and apply
ag.colorado.gov/awdp

Questions?
cda_awd@state.co.us

Apply October 1-31, 2025 to hire interns in 2026.

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