



## The Diverse Structure and Organization of U.S. Beef Cow-Calf Farms

*William D. McBride, Jr., Kenneth Mathews*

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Beef cow-calf production in the United States is widespread, occurring in every State. Nearly 765,000 farms, about 35 percent of the 2.2 million farms in the United States, had a beef cow inventory in 2007. Most of these were small, part-time operations. About a third of farms that raise beef animals had a beef cow inventory of less than 10 cows, more than half had fewer than 20 cows, and nearly 80 percent had fewer than 50 cows. In this study, ERS uses data from USDA's 2008 Agricultural Resource Management Survey for U.S. beef cow-calf operations to examine the structure, costs, and characteristics of beef cow-calf producers. Many small operations are "rural residence farms" that specialize in beef cow-calf production, but their income from off-farm sources exceeds that from the farm. Most beef cow-calf production occurs on large farms, but cow-calf production is not the primary enterprise on many of these farms. Findings suggest that operators of beef cow-calf farms have a diverse set of goals for the cattle enterprise.

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