Make Informed Decisions

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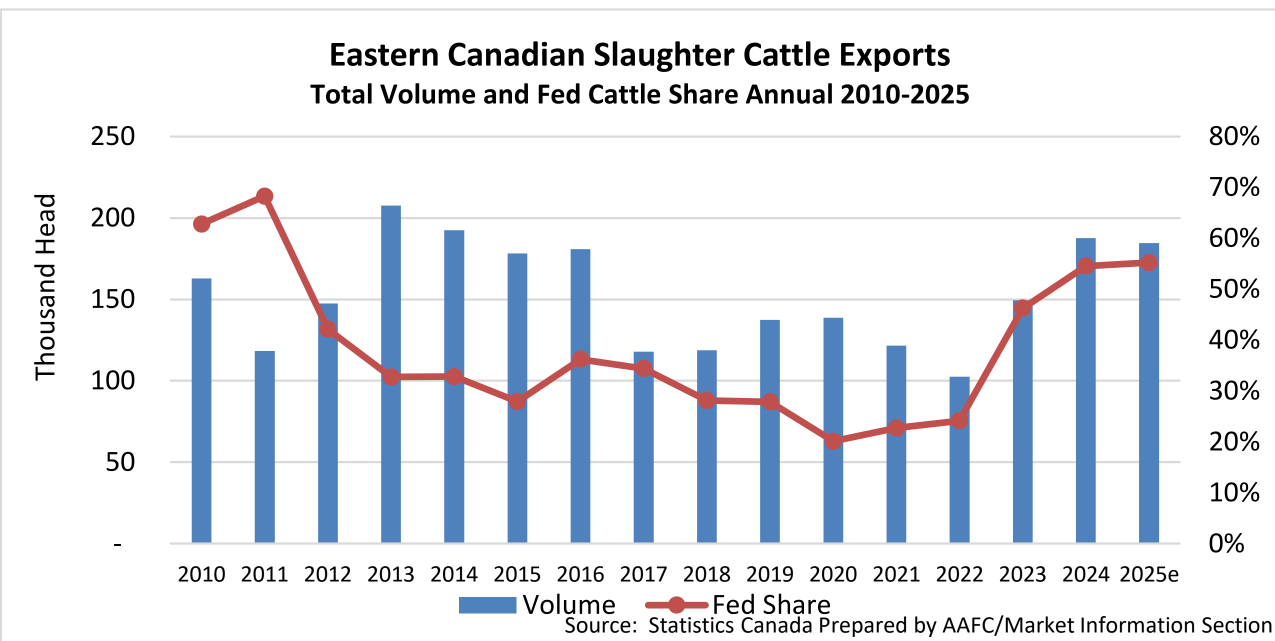
2025 Ontario Cattle Exports, Making a Price Difference

Eastern Canadian slaughter cattle exports will amount to about 185,000 head in 2025. That is an estimate based on Statistics Canada trade data, compiled by AgCanada Market Information Section (MIS), through November. That is down 2% from the 187,500 head in 2024. The 2024 export volume was inflated by the 6-week strike at the Guelph Cargill plant in June/July that year. The 2024 Cargill strike probably resulted in an extra 20,000+ head of steers, heifers and cows going south that normally would have gone to Guelph.

The last two years have seen the largest volume of slaughter cattle sold south since 2014. According to the data compiled by AgCanada MIS, 55% of the slaughter cattle going south in the last two years have been fed cattle, and 45% non-fed. It is estimated that about 80+% of the eastern Canadian exports are from Ontario, and the bulk of the rest from Quebec.



Three Main Plants

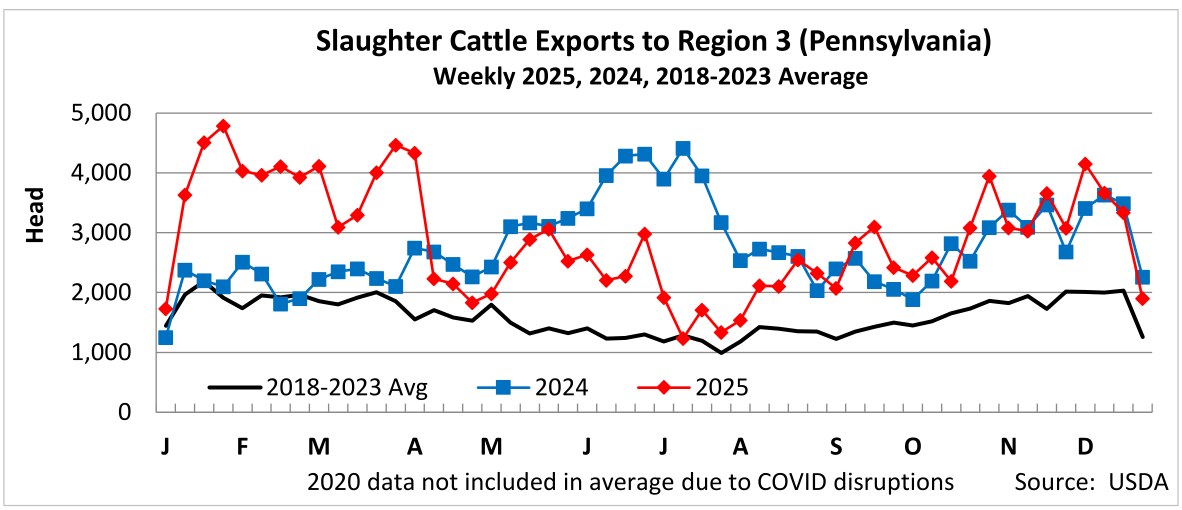
There are three main plants that take eastern Canadian cattle: JBS at Souderton, Pennsylvania JBS; Cargill at Wyalusing, Pennsylvania and American Foods Group (AFG), Green Bay, Wisconsin. In addition to those three, another plant of note is Nicholas Meats, Loganton, Pennsylvania. Some Quebec cows go to Brown Packing in Gaffney, South Carolina.

Steve Kay, Cattle Buyers Weekly, lists Souderton at 2,000 per day, Wyalusing at 1,900 and Green Bay at 2,500. Kay classifies each of the three as Fed/Non-Fed plants. Nicholas and Brown are cow-only plants. Kay pegs Nicholas at 1,200 and Brown at 1,150 per day.

Breaking Down the 2025 Shipments

The following are rough estimations of the breakdown of Canadian shipments by plant and cattle classification for 2025. The estimations are based on a combination of industry educated guesses, plant size listings and trade statistics.

- The average weekly shipments of cattle going to Pennsylvania was about 2,900 head for 2025.
- Of the cattle that go to Pennsylvania, about 70% would be fed and 30% cows.
- Souderton would take over 80% of the cattle that go to Pennsylvania, amounting to about 2,300-2,400/week.
- Of the cattle destined for Souderton, 80-85% are fed cattle.
- The remaining 5-600 head per week going to Pennsylvania would be all cows between Wyalusing and Loganton (mostly Wyalusing).
- The shipments to AFG Green Bay averaged about 750 head per week during 2025.
- Those AFG cattle were cows and fed Holstein steers and heifers.



The reason for the big increase in volumes going south from eastern Canada the last two years is supply and demand. The eastern plants, led by Souderton have strong demand for imported cattle given tight local region supplies. The inventory of feeder steers, heifers and calves in the main eastern seaboard states declined by over 8% between January 1, 2021, and January 1, 2026. For the United States as a whole, the supply of those same cattle types declined 6.5% over the same time. Given that supply is even tighter in the east than in the nation, means that U.S. demand should stay strong in 2026.

The cattle are sold south on a spot market bid. Ontario cattle feeders selling south are a mix of steady and opportunistic suppliers. Most volume is from the steady suppliers.

The exports are an important part of the market. In 2025 there were 603,000 cattle slaughtered in Ontario and Quebec federally inspected plants. Add in the 185,000 slaughter exports for total fed and non-fed slaughter marketings of 788,000. The slaughter exports comprise nearly one quarter of total slaughter marketings in Ontario and Quebec.

Impact on Price

These exports place upward pressure on local Ontario prices. Cargill would have had to keep the Souderton export floor price in mind when making local bids. That was especially the case in 2024 and 2025 when Souderton demand was more pronounced.

In the U.S. over the past several years, every time slaughter supply dropped 1%, price increased by 2%. The slaughter exports reduced local eastern Canadian supplies by 24%. That implies a 48% price impact, using the U.S. price flexibility measure. Last year, the Ontario fed cattle price spread averaged C$-17/cwt against Nebraska. Without the exports, the spread could have been C$-25. That is worse than the actual spread in Alberta in 2025.

Over the last several years, the spread against Nebraska averaged C$-12/cwt. Last year it averaged C$-17, a relatively poor year. Without the exports, the spread would have been much worse.

Kevin Grier, January 2026

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