A Family Affair	Cattle and beef production represent the largest single segment of American agriculture. In fact, the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) says more farms are classified as beef cattle operations (35 percent) than any other type of farm. There are more than 800,000 beef producers in the United States who are responsible for more than 100 million head of beef cattle. Most farms and ranches in the United States, including cattle ranches, are family owned and operated. Ninety-five percent of farms and ranches are run by the full or part owner of the operation. When it comes to cattle production, most operations are smaller than you might think; according to USDA, the typical herd averages just 40 head of cattle. However, these small farms and ranches don't produce the majority of the beef in the United States. Herds with more than 100 head of cattle represent 51 percent of the beef cow inventory. Producers with fewer than 40 head of cattle usually have multiple sources of farm income or also have employment off the farm.
Cattle Income	About 28 percent of all cattle came from operations with less than $250,000 in overall sales in 2004. Other statistics from USDA illustrate that cow-calf operations have multiple sources of income and generally are not large. In fact, the smallest farms documented by USDA, with incomes less than $10,000 a year from farming, are often cattle operations. According to the 2002 Census of Agriculture, the average annual income from livestock on farms in this country is $38,438. The average total income from a beef cattle operation in 2004 was $74,200, the lowest income of any type of farm. Two-thirds of the income from very small farms comes from two sources – cattle and hay. By contrast, only 10 percent of the income from large family farms (greater than $500,000) comes from cattle. In fact, about 46 percent of beef producers say they rely on off-farm income, even though two-thirds say they work more than 1,000 hours a year on their farming operations. Less than one-third of cattle operators claim farming as their occupation, while 23 percent consider themselves retired. Overall, 47 percent of a beef producer's income in 2004 was from off-farm wages or salaries. Farming income represented only 17 percent of the farm operator's income, according to the 2004 USDA Agricultural Resource Management Survey.
Demographics	According to USDA's 2002 Census of Agriculture, the average age of the American farmer is 55.3 years old. The average age for farmers has been above 50 since the 1974 Census of Agriculture and has increased in each census since that time. Cattle operations have long been considered family traditions, handed down from generation to generation. In a survey conducted by the Iowa Beef Center, 60 percent of Iowa beef producers are expected to pass their operation on to their children. The 2002 Census of Agriculture also found that nearly one in five cattle producers is a college graduate, one in four has attended some college and 85 percent are high school graduates.
Impact on Society	Beef production affects the U.S. economy. According to USDA, producers of meat animals in 2005 were responsible for more than $64 billion in added value to the U.S. economy, as measured by their contribution to the national output.

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Updated 10/2006