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Methodology

The methodology and sampling plan for the National Stocker Survey were designed to reflect operations today's industry and be similar to the 2007 study so we can compare the data between studies.

On April 6, 2020, Informa Engage mailed cover letter and questionnaire to 16,000 beef producers.

To encourage prompt response and increase the response rate overall, the following marketing research techniques were used:

- The BEEF magazine log was used on the envelopes to tie the effort to the publication.
- A postage-paid business reply envelope.
- A follow-up mailing was sent to non-respondents on May 18, 2020, this included a one-dollar bill as a token of appreciation.

By July 17, 2020 there were 2,032 completed surveys for a response rate of 12.7%.

Methodology for this project conforms to accepted marketing research methods, practices, and procedures.
Definitions

For the purposes of the National Stocker Survey, stocker and backgronder cattle are defined as those cattle grown after weaning prior to entering the feedlot.

The National Stocker Survey segregated stockers and backgrounders by operation type:

**Pure Stocker** (PS)—those involved exclusively in stockering and backgrounding cattle.

**Cow-Calf Stocker** (CCS)—those involved in both the cow-calf business as well as stockering and backgrounding cattle.

**Feedlot Stocker** (FS)—those involved in both stockering and feeding cattle.

**Whole Cycle Stocker** (WCS)—Operators involved in cow-calf, stocker and cattle feeding segments of the business.
Preface

Stocker and backgrounding operations continue to be an essential part of the U.S. cattle and beef industries. Growing cattle outside of the feedlot enables aggregating and sorting cattle of widely divergent types, classes and weights into more homogenous groups for future management, all the while decreasing overall production cost and matching beef demand to cattle supply.

While the dynamic nature of this segment often makes it difficult to clearly define, the stocker and backgrounding sector plays a critical role within the industry. For a minority of those involved, it is a fulltime job and the sole source of income. For others, it is an enterprise blending seamlessly into a larger operation, leveraging existing resources.

Understanding this diverse sector is the reason behind the 2020 National Stocker Survey. It builds upon the first one conducted in 2007 by characterizing the sector, while also providing an opportunity to view trends over time.

None of it is possible without the committed guidance of experts from 11 Land Grant universities and other professionals who shaped the first survey and laid the foundation for the current endeavor.

Appreciation is also due to Zoetis for their sponsorship of this 2020 survey.

The lion’s share of thanks, however, goes to the stocker producers and backgrounders willing to invest their time in sharing insights to their operations and what they do.
Executive Summary

Note: some of the questions alluded to stocker operators and backgrounders. For purposes of the narrative, the term stocker is used to represent both.

Cow-calf stockers continue to be the largest segment of stocker producers (58%) followed by pure stockers (21%), whole-cycle stockers (15%) and feedlots stockers (5%)

Type of Cattle Operation

While the relative ranking of each stocker segment is the same as in 2007, 4% more respondents in 2020 were pure stockers and 7% fewer were cow-calf stockers. However, there were 4% more whole-stockers. One rational explanation is some cow-calf stockers transitioned to the whole-cycle category over time, leveraging the value of their genetics. As well, it’s also possible some cow-calf stockers liquidated their cow herd and transitioned to a pure stocker operation.

Over time, the stocker enterprise appears to represent more economic importance.

For one thing, only 20% of respondents say they have an off-farm job (Q.2); that’s 6% fewer than in 2007.
Have an off-Farm Job

As logic suggests, the number of producers who have off-farm jobs decreases with age: from 36% for respondents 44 years old and younger, to 14% for those 65 years and older.

Likewise, off-farm employment declines with the number of cattle: from 27% of respondents running 1-199 head, to 10% for those running 2,500 head or more.

Fewer feedlot stockers (12%) and whole-cycle stockers (16%) say they have an off-farm job than other operation types: 19% for pure stockers and 22% for cow-calf stockers.

At the same time, stockers represent a larger portion of annual gross income over time. Overall, 46% of respondents (Q.9) derive 51% or more of their annual gross income from stockers, compared to 41% in 2007. More specifically, in 2020 19% of respondents say stockers account for 76% to 100% of their annual gross income; 27% of respondents say it accounts for 51% to 75% of annual gross income.

Percent Annual Gross Income from Stocker Operation

As logic suggests, stocker contribution to annual gross income increases with operation size: 67% of operations with 1,000 head or more generate 51% or more of their annual gross income from stockers; 86% for operations with 2,500 head or more. Even so, stockers contribute 76% to 100% of annual gross income in just 47% of the operations with 2,500 head or more; 37% for operations with 1,000-2,499 head.
The percentage of gross annual income also increases with operator age, from 39% of those 44 and younger saying stockers account for 51% or more of their income, to 50% of respondents aged 65 or older.

As well, most respondents run stocker cattle year-round (57%). Compared to the last survey, there was little overall change (Q. 4), but a tendency toward more running year-round.

**Run Stockers or Backgrounders Year-Round**

The percentage of those running stockers year-round increases with operation size, from 44% for those with 1-199 head, to 92% for operations with 2,500 head or more. Feedlot stockers (77%) and pure stockers (70%) are most likely to run year-round, versus 62% for whole cycle and 49% for cow-calf stocker.

On average, respondents are running more stockers over time, too (Q. 12). Respondents marketed an estimated average of 753 head per year, between known marketings in 2015-2019, and expected marketings in 2020-21. Across those years, the estimated average increased from 728 head in 2015 to an estimated average of 790 head in 2021. Increased marketings can also be seen across both surveys. In 2007, respondents marketed an estimated average of 694 head per year, between known marketings in 2002-2006 and expected marketings in 2007-08.

For 2015-21, 35% to 36% of respondents say they marketed 200-499 head of stockers annually, compared to 30% to 32% saying they marketed 1-199 head; 17% to 18% marketed 500-999 head; 9% to 11% marketed 1,000-2,499 head; 1% to 3% marketed 2,500 head or more.

Slightly more stocker operations are retaining ownership in some of their cattle through harvest (Q. 15): 54% in 2020 versus 49% in 2007. Of those who retain ownership, 28% of respondents say they retain ownership in 100% of their stocker cattle.

**Percent of Stockers Retained Through Harvest**
On average, respondents say they retain ownership in 37% of the cattle they stocker through harvest. Those who retain ownership in at least some of their cattle do so on an average 69% of them, versus 74% in 2007.

Feedlot stockers retain ownership in the largest percentage of cattle through harvest (72%), followed by whole-cycle stockers (63%). For pure stockers, it’s 30% and for cow-calf stocker it’s 28%.

Over time, there is also slightly more emphasis on owning and managing stockers aimed at value-added programs (Q. 20). On average, 20% of stocker cattle in 2020 were owned and managed for value-added markets (CAB, all-natural, etc.), versus 13% in 2007. More specifically, 22% of respondents say they run 51% or more of their stockers with value-added markets in mind; 15% run 76% to 100% of their stockers with that intent. On the other end of the scale, 66% of respondents say they run no cattle for value-added markets.

Slightly more producers aged 55-64 (24%) run 51% or more of their cattle for value-added markets, compared to 22% for producers aged 65 and older, to 19% for other age groups.

**Percent Stockers Run with Intent to Market Into A Value-Added Branded Beef Program**

Whole-cycle stockers (56%) are the most likely to run some cattle for value-added programs than other operation types (19% to 41%). Of those that run some cattle for
value-added, whole-cycle stockers also run the highest percentage of cattle with that in mind; 32% of whole-cycle stockers run 51% to 100% for value-added, versus 26% for feedlot stockers, 22% for cow-calf stockers and 12% for pure stockers.

Perhaps the most startling revelation of the 2020 stocker survey is how much stocker producers are aging (Q. 6): 83% of respondents are 55 or older, compared to 60% in 2007. 60% are 64 or older, compared to 32% in 2007. For context, the average age of agricultural producers in the 2017 USDA Census of Agriculture was 57.5.

**Respondent Age**

While there are slight differences, the trend holds true across operation size and operation type.

Age can also be seen in operational maturity (Q. 10): 53% of respondents say they have actively purchased/managed stockers for at least the past 31 years; 32% for more than 40 years. Only 11% have purchased/managed for 10 years or less.

**Number Years Actively Purchasing/Managing Beef Stockers/Backgrounders**
With that said, 68% of those 44 years or younger have purchased/managed stocker cattle for 6-10 years (32%) or 11-20 years (36%). Overall though, purchasing/managing tenure increases with age.

By size, operations with 1,000-2,499 head (37%) represent the category with the most operators purchasing/managing for 40 years or more.

Keep in mind, 50% of respondents classified themselves as the owner/manager of the operation, while another 45% said they were the owner (Q. 5). That’s key to understanding that while current owners and managers are aging, the next generation appears set to continue many of the operations.

Overall, 76% of respondents say family is involved in the day-to-day operation (Q.8). Of those, 62% say children are involved, 57% say the spouse and 13% say a sibling.

**Which Family Members**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Family Member</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Child or children</td>
<td>62%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spouse</td>
<td>57%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sibling</td>
<td>13%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parent</td>
<td>11%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Uncle or cousin</td>
<td>2%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

By operation size, defined as the number of head marketed annually, 63% of operations with 2,500 head or more say children are involved in the operation; 66% of those with 1,000-2,499 head; 68% of those with 500-999 head.

As might be suspected, more whole-cycle stockers (84%) say family is involved in the operation, compared to 76% for cow-calf stockers and feedlot stockers; 68% for pure stockers.

Of those, more cow-calf stockers (66%) and whole cycle stockers (68%) say children are involved in the operation than pure stockers (43%) and feedlot stockers (60%).

In terms of geography (Q. 25), respondents say they own and manage the majority of their cattle in Kansas (11%), Nebraska (10%), Missouri (9%), Oklahoma (8%) and Texas (7%). That’s the same ranking as last time, but 5% more cite Nebraska as the state of
primary stocker activity, while 6% fewer cite Texas. The long-term, widespread drought in the Southern Plains between surveys likely explains some of the transition.

**Stocker Procurement**

Keeping in mind cow-calf stockers represent the majority of responding stocker operations – 38% of respondents say 76% to 100% of their calves come from their own cow herd (Q. 26). Other sources for 76% to 100% of incoming cattle include: local sale barn (15%), in-state order buyer (5%), regional livestock market (3%), out-of-state order buyer (3%).

**Operation type and size have the most bearing on how calves are acquired.**

By herd size, operations with 1-199 head (56%) and 200-499 head (44%) are significantly more likely to get 76% to 100% of their calves from their own cow herds than operations with 1,000-2,499 head (8%) and 2,500 head or more (2%).

Slightly fewer operations with 200-499 head (13%) get 76% to 100% of their cattle from the local livestock market than other operation sizes (15% to 18%).

In terms of operation type, more cow-calf stockers (53%) and whole-cycle stockers (37%) get 76% to 100% of their cattle from their own cow herd, versus 1% to 6% for other operation types.

More pure stockers (38%) and feedlot stockers (27%) get 76% to 100% of their calves from the local livestock market than other operation types (6% to 7%).

Of the stocker cattle purchased by respondents in 2019, 57% were steers, 39% were heifers, 3% were cutter bulls, and 2% were cull cows or heiferettes (Q. 18). That’s similar to the 2007 survey.

**What Percent of Your Stocker Cattle Were**
The mix is similar by age, with a slight tendency toward producers 44 and younger running more cutter bulls (5% versus 2% to 3% in other categories).

Composition of cattle gender is similar by operation type, although pure stockers and feedlot stockers run a higher percentage of steers (68% and 67%, respectively), versus 53% for other operation types.

Geographically, most respondents (34%) say 76% to 100% of the cattle they own/manage are native to the Midwest (Q.27), followed by the West (20%), Southeast (18%), Southwest (15%), Mid-Atlantic (8%) and far West (6%). That’s similar to the 2007 survey.

**Stocker Cattle Are Native To**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Region</th>
<th>1 to 25%</th>
<th>26 to 50%</th>
<th>51 to 75%</th>
<th>76 to 100%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Midwest (KS, MO, IA, MN, NE &amp; IL)</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>34%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>West (MT, WY, CO, SD, ND &amp; ID)</td>
<td>3%</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>29%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Southeast (FL, GA, AL, MS, AR, LA, KY &amp; TN)</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>3%</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>18%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Southwest (TX, OK, AZ &amp; NM)</td>
<td>3%</td>
<td>3%</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>15%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mid-Atlantic (NC, SC, VA, PA, WV &amp; MD)</td>
<td>8%</td>
<td>NET 11%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Far West (CA, NV, UT, OR &amp; WA)</td>
<td>6%</td>
<td>NET 8%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Respondents say the average pay weight of calves arriving at their operations the previous two years was 480 lbs. (Q.24), versus 460 lbs. in 2007. The average pay weight on departure was 855 lbs. versus 799 lbs. in 2007. So, operations in the 2020 survey added an average of 375 lbs. to calves, versus 339 lbs. in 2007; 36 lbs. more.

**Average Arrival and Departure Weights**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pay Weight Upon Arrival</th>
<th>Less than 100</th>
<th>100 to 199</th>
<th>200 to 299</th>
<th>300 to 399</th>
<th>400 to 499</th>
<th>500 to 599</th>
<th>600 to 699</th>
<th>700 to 799</th>
<th>800 to 899</th>
<th>900 to 999</th>
<th>1,000 or more</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>4%</td>
<td>1%</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>7%</td>
<td>29%</td>
<td>41%</td>
<td>13%</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>1%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pay Weight Upon Departure</th>
<th>Less than 100</th>
<th>100 to 199</th>
<th>200 to 299</th>
<th>300 to 399</th>
<th>400 to 499</th>
<th>500 to 599</th>
<th>600 to 699</th>
<th>700 to 799</th>
<th>800 to 899</th>
<th>900 to 999</th>
<th>1,000 or more</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>0%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>1%</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>8%</td>
<td>23%</td>
<td>38%</td>
<td>17%</td>
<td>12%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The amount of weight added (difference between arrival and departure pay weight) to the typical calf varies significantly across age, with those 65 and older adding the least weight (351 lbs.), followed by those 44 and younger (394 lbs.) Operators 55-64 add the most weight (415 lbs.), followed by those 44-54 (402 lbs.)

The amount of weight added to the typical calf varies significantly across operation size with operations of 500-999 head adding the most weight (431 lbs.) and operations of 1-199 adding the least weight (349 lbs.)

In terms of purchasing behavior, 58% say they purchase cattle at the average market price (Q. 19), compared to 64% in 2007. Another 29% say they buy cattle below the average market price with intentions of upgrading; it was 26% in 2007. Finally, 13% say they buy calves above the average price, compared to 11% in 2007.

**Typical Stocker Purchasing Behavior**

Producers 44 years old and younger (46%) are more likely to buy cattle below the average market price than those of other age groups (26% to 36%). Buying cattle above the average market price increases slightly with age, from 5% of producers 44 and younger to 15% of producers 65 and older.

Perhaps surprisingly, more cow-calf stockers (31%) and whole-cycle stockers (34%) say they buy calves below the average price than operations of other types (16% to 27%).

**Percent of Stocker Intended to Enter Value Added Program**

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Of those respondents managing cattle with value-added intent (Q. 20), 53% say the cattle were never implanted or fed an antibiotic (Q. 21); 52% say cattle were never treated with an injectable antibiotic; 44% say cattle were never fed an ionophore. That’s similar to the 2007 survey.

For the cattle described above, smaller operations run a higher percentage of value-added cattle never implanted: 63% of value-added cattle for operations with 1-199 head and 55% for operations with 200-499 head, versus 37% to 43% for operations of other sizes.

Likewise, 58% of the value-added cattle were never fed an antibiotic in operations with 1-199 head; 52% in operations with 200-499 head. It was 47% for operations of other sizes.

Smaller operations run a higher percentage of value-added cattle never treated with an injectable antibiotic: 58% of value-added cattle for operations with 1-199 head and 56% for operations with 200-499 head, versus 27% to 45% for operations of other sizes.

Conversely, operations with 1-199 head feed an ionophore to 53% of value-added cattle and those with 200-499 head feed an ionophore to 44%. For operations of other sizes 32% to 38% of cattle receive an ionophore.

As for operation type, among those managing cattle for value-added purposes, pure stockers say 41% were never implanted and feedlot stockers say 36%, versus 57% to 58% for other operation types.

Cow-calf stockers run 57% of value-added cattle never receiving an injectable antibiotic, versus 40% to 49% for other operation types. That’s similar for feeding an antibiotic.

Cow-calf stockers manage 46% of their value-intended cattle without feeding an ionophore; 47% for whole-cycle stockers, compared to 35% to 38% for other operation types.
Source verification is most commonly required (55%) of those managing cattle with value-added intent (Q. 22), followed by age verification (39%), genetic verification (22%) and ‘other’ (29%). According to respondents, ‘other’ includes verification of such things as Beef Quality Assurance, preconditioning and grass-fed.

**Attributes for Which Certification/Verification is Required from Suppliers**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Certification/Verification</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Source verification</td>
<td>55%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age verification</td>
<td>39%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Genetic verification</td>
<td>22%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>29%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Only 16% of respondents say they require verification or certification via Quality Systems Assessment or Process Verified Programs.

**Stocker Marketing**

Most stockers (31%) say they own a group of stockers for 121-180 days followed by 19% who say they own a group of cattle for 91-120 days, 181-240 days and more than 240 days (Q. 16). Only 3% own them for 60 days or less; 9% for 61-90 days. That’s similar to the 2007 survey.

**Average Length of Time You Own/Manage a Group of Stockers/Backgrounders**

Length of ownership is generally similar by producer age. It’s also similar by operation size, with 120-180 days of ownership the most prevalent. However, those with 200-499

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head (39%), 500-999 head and 1,000-2,499 head (44%) are more likely to own a group of cattle for more than 180 days, compared to 31% for operations with more than 2,500 head and 34% for 1-199 head.

Length of ownership is also similar by operation type, except for 57% of feedlot stockers managing for more than 180 days, versus 44% for pure stockers, 33% for cow-calf stockers and 43% for whole cycle.

Based on the options given (Q. 17), desired selling weight is the most prevalent driver of length of ownership decisions (72%) along with desired profit per head (34%) and available grazing days (32%).

What Is The Length Of Time You Own/Manage a Group of Stockers/Backgrounders Based On

By age, besides desired selling weight, those 44 or younger (27%) are less likely to also consider available grazing days in their length of ownership decision than those of other age groups (32% to 35%). In addition to desired selling weight, more respondents 44 and younger (47%) also consider desired profit per head, compared to 39% for those 45-54 years, 35% for ages 55-64 and 31% for those 65 or older.

In addition to desired selling weight, more operations with 1,000-2,499 head (45%) and 2,500 head or more (46%) also consider desired profit per head, compared to operations with less than 1,000 head (31-34%).

After desired selling weight, pure stockers (39%) and cow-calf stockers (33%) are more likely than other operation types (19% to 24%) to also consider available grazing days in their length of ownership decision. Whole cycle (40%) are most likely to also consider desired profit per head, compared to 30% to 34% for operations of other types.

Auction barns continue to be the most prevalent venue for marketing stocker cattle, with 45% of respondents saying they market 76% to 100% of their cattle through the local sale barn and 31% saying they do so through a regional sale barn (Q. 56). Video and internet auctions come next, with 20% saying that’s how they market 76% to 100% of their cattle; followed by direct to feedlot with no retained ownership
(19%); retained ownership through a custom yard (15%); and finished at home (15%). That’s similar to the 2007 survey.

**Means of Marketing Cattle**

By and large, the relative ranking of marketing methods is the same across age groups. With that said, for most marketing methods, the percentage of those saying they market 76% to 100% of their cattle via a particular method, increases linearly, from the lowest percentage for those 44 and younger to the highest percentage for those 55 and older.

The exceptions are feeding out in a home feedlot (14% to 17% across all age groups) and those marketing direct to feedlot with no retained ownership, which ranged from 13% for producers aged 45-54 and 55-64, to 17% for those 44 and younger, to 24% for those 65 and older.

By operation size, the use of local sale barns for selling 76% to 100% of the cattle declines linearly, from the smallest to the largest operations: 59% of respondents with 1-199 head market 76% to 100% of their cattle through a local sale barn, versus 18% of those with 2,500 head or more.

The same holds true for those marketing 76% to 100% of their cattle through regional markets: from 46% of respondents with 1-199 head to 9% with 2,500 head or more.

Operations with 1,000-2,499 head are as likely to market directly to a feedlot without retained ownership as they are to market via the local sale barn: 28% say they market 76% to 100% of their cattle by those means. By contrast, 34% of operations with 2,500 head market 76% to 100% of their cattle directly to a feedlot without retained ownership versus 18% through local sale barn.

Similarly, more operations with 1,000-2,499 head (28%) and those with 2,500 head or more (22%) retain ownership in 76% to 100% of their cattle through a custom feedlot than operations of other sizes (4% to 14%).

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More operations with 200-499 head (25%) use video/internet to market 76% to 100% of the cattle than operations of other sizes (14% to 19%).

More operations with 2,500 head or more (21%) forward contract 76% to 100% of their cattle than operations of other sizes (from 3% for operations with 1-199 head to 14%).

Regardless of retaining ownership, **36% of respondents say they receive feedlot data** for at least some of the cattle they market (Q. 57). It ranges from 15% saying they receive feedlot data on 76% to 100% of their cattle, to 5% saying they receive feedlot data on 26% to 50% of the cattle they market.

### Percent of Stocker for Which Feedlot Data Is Received

The percentage of those receiving no feedlot data decreases by operation size, from 82% of those with 1-199 head saying they receive no feedlot data to 27% for those with 2,500 head or more. Operations with 200-2,499 head (17% to 19%) say they get feedlot data on 76% to 100% of their cattle, regardless of retained ownership, versus 8% for those with 1-199 head and 23% for those with 2,500 head or more.

More pure stockers (73%) and cow-calf stockers (72%) say they receive no feedlot data than feedlot stockers (32%) and whole-cycle stockers (36%). More feedlot stockers (43%) and whole-cycle stockers (29%) say they receive feedlot data on 76% to 100% of their cattle, than operations of other types (9% to 10%).

Regardless of retaining ownership, **31% of respondents say they receive carcass data** for at least some of the cattle they market (Q. 57b). It ranges from 11% saying they receive carcass data on 1% to 25% of their cattle to 5% saying they receive feedlot data on 26% to 75% of the cattle they market; 10% receive the data on 76% to 100% of their cattle.

### Percent of Stockers That Receive Carcass Data

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The percentage of those receiving no carcass data decreases by operation size, from 84% of those with 1-199 head saying their receive no feedlot data to 36% for those with 2,500 head or more. Operations with 2,500 head or more (20%) say they get carcass data on 76% to 100% of their cattle, versus 6% for those with 1-199 head and 10% to 12% for operations of other sizes.

More pure stockers (81%) and cow-calf stockers (76%) say they receive no carcass data than feedlot stockers (40%) and whole-cycle stockers (38%). More feedlot stockers (26%) and whole-cycle stockers (25%) say they receive feedlot data on 76% to 100% of their cattle, regardless of retained ownership, than operations of other types (4% to 6%).

The percentage of respondents receiving feedlot and/or carcass data on their cattle, regardless of retained ownership, is similar between National Stocker Surveys.

By far, respondents rely most on the local sale barn as their source of market information (Q. 58) .

**Sources of Market Information**
Overall, 64% of respondents say they rely on the local sale barn for market information followed by USDA reports (43%), the Chicago Mercantile Exchange—CME (34%), stocker publications and newsletters (30%) and order buyers (26%).

There’s little difference in the ranking of price source or relevance across age. More producers aged 45-54 (72%) rely on the local sale barn for price information than other age groups (62-66%). Reliance on USDA reports and CME information declines linearly with age, although both are among the top three sources cited by all age groups.

Reliance on the local sale barn for price information declines linearly by operation size, from 71% for herds with 1-199 head to 42% for operations with 2,500 head or more.

More operations with 2,500 head or more (52%) rely on USDA reports than operations of other sizes (41% to 45%).

Reliance on CME information increases linearly by operation size from 24% for herds with 1-199 head to 66% for operations with 2,500 head or more.

More operation with 1,000-2,499 head (31%) and 2,500 head or more (42%) rely on CattleFax than operations of other sizes (11% for those with 1-199 head to 25%).

More operations with 500-999 head (23%) rely on other stocker producers for price information than operations of other sizes (14% to 20% for operations with 2,500 head or more).

Reliance on DTN increases with operation size, from 10% to 19% for operations with few than 1,000 head to 28% to 29% for operations with 1,000 head or more.

Operation type also plays a role in price information preferences.

More pure stockers (60%) and cow-calf stockers (68%) rely on the local sale barn for price information than operations of other types (49% to 57%).

Fewer feedlot stockers (37%) rely on USDA reports than operations of other types (43% to 45%).

More pure stocker (43%) and feedlot stockers (40%) rely on CME information than operations of other types (30% to 35%).

Fewer feedlot stockers (20%) rely on stocker publications and e-newsletters than operations of other types (30% to 32%).

More pure stockers (31%) rely on order buyers for price information than operations of other types (24% to 27%).

More cow-calf stockers (20%) and whole-cycle stockers (23%) rely on CattleFax reports than operations of other types (16% to 18%).

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Fewer feedlot stockers (11%) rely on other stocker producers than operations of other types (16% to 20%).

More feedlot stockers (34%) rely on DTN than operations of other types (13% to 18%).

Significantly more respondents in the latest survey (43%) rely on USDA reports than in 2007 (37%). Significantly fewer today (11%) say they rely on the local newspaper than in 2007 (21%).

With market information in mind, **23% of respondents utilize cattle futures to manage market risk** and 17% use options (Q. 59). Both trail far behind a focus on low cost production (59%) and buying high-quality cattle (36%) as risk management tools. Others include retained ownership (22%), buying cheap cattle (17%), forward contracting inputs/outputs (14%). That’s similar to the 2007 survey.

### Practices Uses to Manage Risk

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Practice</th>
<th>Uses to Manage Risk</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Focus on low cost production</td>
<td>59%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Buying high quality cattle</td>
<td>46%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Futures market contracts</td>
<td>23%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Retained ownership</td>
<td>22%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Buying cheap cattle</td>
<td>17%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Options on futures</td>
<td>17%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Forward contracting inputs/outputs</td>
<td>14%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Custom operation</td>
<td>8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Livestock Risk Protection Insurance</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Livestock Gross Margin Insurance</td>
<td>1%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Focus on low-cost production decreases linearly by age, from 69% for those 44 and younger to 57% for those 65 and older. More cow-calf stockers (63%) focus on low cost to manage market risk than operations of other types (53% to 57%).

More producers 54 and younger (30% to 33%) use futures contracts than other age groups to manage market risk (from 26% to 20% for those 65 and older). More producers aged 45-54 (26%) use options than other age groups (15% to 18%).

**Use of futures to manage market risk increases linearly with operation size**, from 9% for those with 1-199 head to 52% for those with 2,500 head or more. Likewise, use of options increases with size, from 6% for those with 1-199 head to 32% for those with 2,500 head or more. More feedlot stockers (41%) use futures to manage market risk than operations of other types (20-29%).
Retained ownership as a means to manage market risk increases linearly with operation size, from 14% for those with 1-199 head to 30% for those with 2,500 head or more. More whole-cycle stockers (44%) and feedlot stockers (34%) use retained ownership to manage market risk than operations of other types (10% to 19%).

More producers aged 45-54 (26%) forward contract inputs/outputs for risk management than other age groups: from 10% for those aged 65 and older to 19%. Forward contracting inputs/outputs as a means to manage market risk increases linearly with operation size, from 6% for those with 1-199 head to 43% for those with 2,500 head or more. More whole-cycle stockers (26%) forward contact inputs/outputs to manage market risk than operations of other types (11% to 15%).

As for tracking economic performance of the operation (Q. 44), profit/loss, group weight at shipping, group average daily gain and cost of gain are the most prevalent performance measures routinely collected, monitored and calculated for each group of stockers/backgrounders owned or managed (51% for cost of gain to 69% for profit/loss). Next are group mortality percentage, group weight between arrival and shipping, group weight on arrival (processing) and group morbidity percentage (from 32% for group morbidity percentage to 46% for group mortality percentage). Individual cattle measures are among the least collected and monitored. Overall, the relative frequency of collection and monitoring is similar across age groups, operation sizes and operation types.

**Performance Measure Routinely Collected For Groups of Stockers**

- **Profit/Loss**: 69%
- **Group weight at shipping**: 54%
- **Group Average Daily Gain**: 54%
- **Cost of gain**: 51%
- **Group mortality percentage**: 46%
- **Group weight between arrival and shipping**: 43%
- **Group weight on arrival (processing)**: 41%
- **Group morbidity percentage**: 32%
- **Value of gain**: 25%
- **Feed efficiency (conversion)**: 24%
- **Individual weight on arrival (processing)**: 23%
- **Individual weight between arrival and shipping**: 19%
- **Individual chronic percentage**: 18%
- **Individual Average Daily Gain**: 15%
- **Individual weight at shipping**: 12%

Performance measures collected and the prevalence of collection is virtually identical in 2020, compared to 2007.

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For the most part, prevalence of collection and monitoring increases with operation size for profit/loss, group weight at shipping, group average daily gain, cost of gain, group mortality percentage, group weight between arrival and shipping, group weight on arrival/processing and group morbidity percentage.

Collecting and monitoring feed efficiency (conversion) is more prevalent for operations with 2,500 head or more (35%) and 500-999 head (30%) than for other operation sizes (22% to 24%). Collecting individual weight on arrival/processing (17%) is less prevalent for operations with 1,000-2,499 head, compared to operations of other sizes (24% to 28%). Likewise, collecting individual weight between arrival and shipping (13%) is less prevalent for operations with 1,000-2,499 head, compared to operations of other sizes (19% to 23%).

Monitoring group chronic percentage increases with operation size, from 11% for operations with 1-199 head, to 34% of operations with 2,500 head or more. Prevalence of monitoring individual average daily gain is less prevalent for operations with 2,500 head or more (11%) than operations of other sizes (14% to 17%). Collecting and monitoring individual weights at shipping is less prevalent for operations with 1,000-2,499 head (7%) and operations with 2,500 head or more (11%) than for operations of other sizes (13% to 14%).

Slightly more pure stockers (59%) collect and monitor group weight at shipping than other operation types (53% to 54%). More feedlots stockers (65%) monitor group average daily gain than other operation types (51% to 58%). Pure stockers (44%) are less likely to collect and monitor cost of gain than other operation types (52% to 57%). Fewer whole-cycle stockers (42%) look at group mortality percentage than other operation types (46% to 53%). More pure stockers (50%) and feedlot stockers (48%) monitor group weight between arrival and shipping than other operation types (38% to 40%). Fewer cow-calf stockers (38%) track group weight on arrival/processing than other operation types (42% to 51%). Whole-cycle stockers (28%) monitor group morbidity percentage less than other operation types (32% to 38%). More feedlot stockers (39%) and whole-cycle stockers (35%) measure and monitor feed efficiency than other operation types (18% to 22%). More feedlot stockers (30%) and whole-cycle stockers (28%) measure and monitor individual weight at arrival/processing than other operation types (19% to 23%). More feedlot stockers (23%) and whole-cycle stockers (20%) measure and monitor individual weight between arrival and shipping than other operation types (18%). Fewer pure stockers (8%) monitor individual weight at shipping than other operation types (12% to 16%).

For all of the technological advances since the advent of the electronic Personal Digital Assistant and smartphones, **most performance measures continue to be collected by hand** (Q. 45).

**Means of Collecting Performance Data**

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Specifically, 82% of respondents say handwritten records are used to collect performance measures, compared to 26% using a computer spreadsheet and 8% using commercial software.

While still in the minority, more producers 44 and younger (44%) and producers aged 45-54 (34%) say they collect and monitor performance measures with a spreadsheet than other age groups (22% to 25%). Likewise, more producers 44 and younger (16%) and say they collect and monitor performance measures with computer software than other age groups (7% to 11%).

More operations with 500-999 head (32%) and 2,500 or more head (37%) use a computer spreadsheet for collecting and monitoring performance measures than operations of other sizes (23% to 29%). More operations with 1,000-2,499 head (29%) and 2,500 head or more (37%) use commercial software for collecting and monitoring than operations of other sizes (5% to 7%).

More feedlot stockers (32%) and whole-cycle stockers (34%) use computer spreadsheets to collect and monitor performance measures than operations of other types (23% to 24%). Slightly more feedlot stockers (12%) and whole-cycle stockers (11%) use commercial software to collect and monitor performance measures than operations of other types (6% to 7%).

When asked what barriers there were to collecting and tracking performance measures (Q. 46), 48% said it was because tracking was manual, followed by 42% who said they had no barriers. Another 13% said identifying areas of improvement was difficult, followed by 5% saying software was difficult to use.

**Barriers to Collecting Management Data**
Fewer cow-calf stockers (37%) say there are no barriers to collecting and tracking performance measures than operations of other types (46% to 53%). At the same time, more cow-calf stockers (53%) say manual tracking is a barrier than other operation types (34% for feedlot stockers to 47% for pure stockers).

**Stocker Health**

Perhaps surprising to some, typical pull rates within the first 30 days (Q. 47), due to Bovine Respiratory Disease (BRD), are similar between National Stocker Surveys.

Overall, **60% of respondents say their typical first-month pull rate, due to BRD, is less than 5%;** 22% say it is 5% to 10%; 11% say 11% to 20%; 4% say 21% to 30%; 2% say 31% to 50%.

**Typical Pull Rates of Stockers in First Month After Arrival**

As logic suggests, operation size is closely connected to pull rates in the first month, due to BRD. For instance the percentage of respondents citing a typical pull rate of less than 5% declines as operation size increases, from 74% for those with 1-199 head to 34% for those with 2,500 head or more. Conversely, respondents with 2,500 head or more (15%)
and 1,000-2,499 head (8%) say the typical pull rate in the first month is 21% to 30%, versus 1% to 4% for operations of other sizes. Those with 2,500 head or more (3%) are the only size category saying the typical pull rate is more than 50%.

More cow-calf stockers (64%) and whole-cycle stocker (63%) say the typical pull rate for BRD within the first month is less than 5% than operations of other types (49% to 55%). More pure stockers (9%) say the pull rate is 21% to 30% than operations of other types (2% to 3%). Slightly more pure stockers (4%) and feedlot stockers (5%) say the pull rate is 31% to 50% than other operation types (1%).

More producers 65 years old and older (66%) say their typical pull rate for BRD within a month of arrival is less than 5% than other age groups (45-57). More producers 44 and younger (18%) and 45-54 (15%) say their pull rate is 11% to 20% than other age groups (9%). Fewer producers 44 and younger (1%) and 65 and older (3%) say their pull rate is 21% to 30% than other age groups (7% to 8%).

For broader context, respondents were asked the percentage of stocker cattle they received that fit their definition of low, medium and high risk, in terms of anticipated BRD (Q. 29). Overall, respondents said 24% of incoming cattle were high risk, 35% were medium risk and 61% were low risk.

**Risk Level of Incoming Calves: Anticipated Sickness/Disease Due to BRD**

![Risk Level of Incoming Calves](image)

On average, producers 44 years old and younger receive the highest percentage of high-risk cattle (30%), compared to 23% to 26% for other age categories. That same age group receives the lowest percentage of medium risk cattle (28%), compared to 35% to 36% for the other categories.

Producers aged 55-64 and 65 years and older receive the highest percentage of low-risk cattle (61% ad 65%, respectively) compared to 48% and 51% for the other age categories.

The percentage of high-risk cattle grows with operation size, from 19% for those with 1-199 head to 37% for those with 2,500 head or more. Conversely, the percentage of low-
risk calves declines as operation size increases, from 66% for those with 1-199 head to 50% for those with 2,500 head or more.

Pure stockers receive the highest percentage of high-risk calves (32%) versus 20% to 24% for other operation types. Pure stockers and feedlot stockers (40%) receive more medium risk cattle other operation types (29% to 34%). Cow-calf stockers have the highest percentage of low risk calves (64%) versus 55% to 57% for other operation types.

Overall, 16% of respondents in the latest survey tested arriving cattle for PI-BVDV (Q. 32) and they tested 70% of the cattle – versus 2007, when 25% of respondents said they tested 71% of their incoming cattle.

**Percent of Incoming Stocker Cattle Tested for PI-BVDV**

While pull rates for BRD are similar between both National Stocker Surveys, **death rate within the first 90 days to all causes crept higher** (Q. 49). Compared to 2007, 5% fewer (50%) in 2020 say their death loss in the first 90 days is less than 1%; 3% more (42%) say it’s 1% to 3%; 1% more (6%) say death loss is 4% to 5%; 1% more (2%) say it is more than 5%.

**Typical Death Rate in First 90 Days**

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More producers 44 and younger cite higher typical death losses within the first 90 days, due to all causes, than other age groups: 6% in that age group say death loss is more than 5%, compared to 2% for other age groups; 13% say death loss is 4% to 5%, compared to 5% to 7% for other age groups; 36% say death loss is less than 1%, compared to 49% to 52% for other age groups.

More operations with 2,500 head or more (14%) say the typical death loss within the first 90 days, due to all causes, is more than 5%, compared to other operation sizes (1% to 4%). More operations with 1,000-2,499 head or more (15%) say the typical death loss is 4% to 5%, compared to other operation sizes (2% to 6%). Typical death loss of less than 1%, due to all causes, within the first 90 days, declines with operation size, from 62% for operations with 1-199 head to 27% for operations with 2,500 head or more.

More cow-calf stockers (52%) and whole-cycle stockers (50%) say the typical death loss within the first 90 days, due to all causes, is less than 1%, compared to 35% to 46% for other operation types. More feedlot stockers (52%) say the typical death loss is 1% to 3% than other operation types (40% to 44%).

Respondents were asked the importance of eight factors in assessing the risk for Bovine Respiratory Disease (BRD), using a scale of 1 (low importance) to 5 (high importance). Factor ranking (Q. 31), based on the percentage of respondents ranking each factor 4 or 5 are: level of commingling (42%); visual evaluation (40%); distance hauled (36%); weather during transit (36%); time spent assembling a load (35%); health history (35%); buyer history (35%); rectal temperature (28%).

**Factors in Assessing Risk for BRD**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Factor</th>
<th>High - 5</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>Low - 1</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Origin</td>
<td>53%</td>
<td>26%</td>
<td>18%</td>
<td>14%</td>
<td>8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Level of commingling</td>
<td>44%</td>
<td>26%</td>
<td>18%</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>7%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Visual evaluation</td>
<td>40%</td>
<td>26%</td>
<td>21%</td>
<td>6%</td>
<td>7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Buyer history</td>
<td>38%</td>
<td>24%</td>
<td>18%</td>
<td>8%</td>
<td>13%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Time spent assembling bad</td>
<td>37%</td>
<td>23%</td>
<td>19%</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>11%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Distance hauled</td>
<td>35%</td>
<td>24%</td>
<td>21%</td>
<td>8%</td>
<td>13%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Health history</td>
<td>35%</td>
<td>24%</td>
<td>18%</td>
<td>9%</td>
<td>8%</td>
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<td>Weather during transit</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rectal temperature</td>
<td>23%</td>
<td>18%</td>
<td>15%</td>
<td>27%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

There was little overall difference by age, herd size or operation type. As well, the relative importance and ranking were the same as in 2007.

Incidentally, **62% of respondents say the stocker calves they purchase spend less than two hours on the road to their operation** (Q. 30). Another 22% say they typical haul is 2-5 hours; 8% say 6-9 hours; 5% say 10-14 hours and 2% say more than 14 hours. Overall, that’s similar to the 2007 survey.
Transport Time: From Collection Point to Stocker Operation

Generally, length of haul increases with operation size. For instance, 83% of operations with 1-199 head say the typical haul is less than two hours, versus 25% with 2,500 head or more. Likewise, 18% of operations with 2,500 head or more say the typical haul is 6-9 hours versus 4% of operations with 1-199 head citing that length of haul.

The majority of cattle received at all types of operations travel less than two hours, followed by 2-5 hours. Significantly more feedlot stocker (21%) cite hauls of 6-9 hours, versus 5% to 11% for other operation types. Across all operation types, 2% to 4% say cattle are hauled more than 14 hours.

Stocker Arrival and Processing

Within the first 48 hours of arrival, the majority of respondents (50%) say cattle are placed directly into a dry lot (Q. 35). Another 22% say they place cattle directly into a dry lot before moving to pasture; 21% place cattle in a grass trap or pasture before moving to pasture; 10% place cattle directly on pasture; 3% say they place cattle into a grass trap or small pasture prior to moving them to a dry lot.

Cattle Placement First 48 Hours
The relative ranking is similar, compared to 2007, but 14% more in 2020 say they place cattle directly into a dry lot.

Generally, the ranking of arrival destination holds true by age, although producers 44 and younger are significantly more likely to place cattle directly into a dry lot within the first 48 hours (65%) than the other age groups (46% to 54%).

Although placing cattle directly on pasture within the first 48 hours is among the least used by operations of all sizes, the practice increases linearly from 8% for those with 1-199 head to 19% for operations with 2,500 head or more.

Feedlot stockers (68%) move cattle directly into a dry lot more than other operation types (39% for pure stockers to 59% for whole-cycle stockers). Pure stockers (30%) put cattle directly into a small grass trap or pasture for observation before moving to a pasture more than other operation types (9% for feedlot stockers to 22% for cow-calf stockers).

Of course, arrival weight of the cattle plays a role. The survey defined arrival weight categories as 400 lbs. or lighter, 400-600 lb. and 600 lbs. or heavier.

More respondents (16%) say cattle weighing more than 600 lbs. are placed directly on pasture than 9% who do so with cattle weighing less than 400 lbs. or 400-600 lbs. Likewise, more respondents (57%) say cattle weighing more than 600 lbs. are placed directly into a dry lot than 47% to 50% for the other weight categories. Conversely, 27% say cattle weighing less than 400 lbs. are placed in a grass trap or small pasture within the first 48 hours, compared to 14% to 21% for other arrival weight categories.

Overall, processing cattle the day after arrival (29%) is the most common practice by respondents (Q. 33). Another 21% say cattle are processed the day of arrival or two to three days after arrival. That’s followed by 15% who say cattle are processed pre-
shipment; 8% say 4-7 days after arrival; 5% say 8-14 days after arrival; 3% say more than 14 days after arrival. That’s similar to results of the 2007 survey, although 6% more in 2020 said they waited until 2-3 days after arrival to process.

**Typical Timeline for Processing Incoming Cattle**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Processing Time</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Before shipment to me</td>
<td>15%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Never</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>On Arrival (same day)</td>
<td>21%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The day after arrival</td>
<td>29%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2-3 days after arrival</td>
<td>21%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4-7 days after arrival</td>
<td>8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8-14 days after arrival</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>More than 14 days after arrival</td>
<td>3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>6%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Processing the day after arrival is similar for all arrival weight categories (28% to 31%). Processing 2-3 days after arrival is the next most common choice across weight categories (20% to 23%). Fewer (16%) say cattle weighing more than 600 lbs. on arrival are processed the same day than other weight categories (20% to 23%).

As operation size increases, so does the percentage of cattle processed the day after arrival, from 20% of operations with 1-199 head to 45% with operations of 2,500 head or more. At the same time, more of the largest operations also say they process 2-3 days after arrival — 29% for 1,000-2,499 head and 27% for 2,500 head or more — versus 13% to 25% for other operation sizes. Operations of 2,500 head or more are least likely to have cattle processed before shipment — 8% versus 12% to 17% for other operation sizes.

Significantly more pure stockers (40%) say they process the day after arrival than other operation types (24% to 29%). Whole-cycle stockers utilize pre-shipment processing the least (10%), compared to 13% to 16% for other operation types.

**Stocker Receiving Diets**

As for nutrition, 61% of respondents say they feed a complete receiving ration to newly arrived cattle (Q.36). That’s similar to the 2007 survey.

**Feed A Complete Feed Ration to Newly Arrived Cattle**
More producers aged 44 years and younger (72%) feed a complete ration on arrival than other age groups (59-62%).

Operations with 2,500 head or more are mostly likely to feed a complete ration on arrival (73%), compared to 57% to 66% for operations of other sizes.

Feedlot stockers (69%) and whole-cycle stockers (70%) are more likely to feed a complete ration on arrival than other operation types (54% to 60%).

Of those who feed a complete receiving ration (Q. 36a), 63% say the ration is mixed on farm with a combination of purchased and on-farmed ingredients. That’s 11% more than in 2007. The balance utilizes a complete commercial feed delivered to the operation.

**Composition of Typical Receiving Ration**

Mixing the ration on farm declines with age: 75% for those 44 and younger to 59% for those 65 and older.

On-farm ration mixing increases with operation size, from 54% for operations with 1-199 head to 77% for operations with 2,500 head or more.

Feedlot stockers (92%) and whole-cycle stockers (78%) are more likely to mix rations on the farm than operations of other types (55% to 58%).
Most respondents feed a receiving diet for two week or less (Q. 37): 1-7 days (26%); 8-14 days (25%); 15-21 days (17%); 22-28 days (13%); more than 28 days (19%). That’s similar to the 2007 survey.

Duration of Feeding Receiving Diet

By age, there is little overall difference in the number of days the receiving diet is fed, other than producers 65 years and older (22%) being more likely to feed the receiving ration for more than 28 days (15% to 17% for other age groups).

More operations with 1,000-2,499 head (16%) and operations with 2,500 head or more (18%) feed the receiving rations for 22-28 days than operations of other sizes (10% to 13%).

More feedlot stockers (23%) and whole-cycle stockers (20%) feed the receiving ration for 15-21 days, compared to other operation types (16% to 17%).

More cow-calf stockers (21%) and pure stockers (20%) feed the receiving ration for more than 28 days, compared to other operation types (14% to 16%).

Receiving ration additives cited, by percentage of respondents (Q. 38): vitamin/mineral (59%); salt (40%); Aureomycin (31%); Rumensin (30%); Bovatec (23%); Decoxx (11%); probiotic (10%); yeast (8%); Terramycin (7%); MGA (2%); Gainpro (1%).

Feed Additives Added to Receiving Rations
After receiving, 58% of respondents say they feed an ionophore (Q. 39). That’s 9% more than in the 2007 survey.

**Feed an Ionophore After Receiving Ration**

More producers aged 44 and younger (71%) feed an ionophore after receiving than producers of other ages, from 53% for those 65 and older to 66%.

Fewer operations with 1-199 head (49%) feed an ionophore after receiving than operations of other sizes (60% to 67%).

Fewer cow-calf stockers (56%) feed an ionophore after receiving than other operation types (61% to 67%).

Of those who feed an ionophore after receiving (Q. 40), these are the means of delivery and percentage of respondents who use them: supplement premix included in total mixed rations (44%); free choice loose mineral (30%); complete commercial feed delivered daily (15%); supplement handfed, i.e. 2 lbs./day (12%); free choice mineral tub — 200-250’ (7%); free choice protein tub — 200-250’ (7%); free choice block (6%); self-feeder — commercial or site-prepared bulk feed with pre-mix feeder — refilled less than daily (5%).

**Means of Delivering Ionophore**
More operations with 500-999 head (51%) and those with 2,500 head or more (52%) deliver ionophore within a total mixed ration than operations of other sizes, from 35% for operations with 1-199 head, to 46%. Fewer operations with 500-999 head (23%) deliver the ionophore via loose mineral than operations of other sizes (30% to 32%).

Use of hand-feeding supplement to deliver an ionophore decreases with operation size, from 5% for operations with 2,500 head or more to 20% for operations with 1-199 head.

Fewer operations with 2,500 head or more (3%) utilize a free choice mineral tub to deliver an ionophore than operations of other sizes (6% to 9%). Use of a protein tub to deliver inonphores decreases as operation size increases, from 3% for operations with 2,500 head or more to 11% for operations with 1-199 head. More operations with 1,000-2,499 head (10%) deliver an ionophore via free choice blocks than operations of other sizes (3% to 7%).

More feedlot stockers (60%) and whole-cycle stockers (52%) deliver an ionophore through a total mixed ration than other operation types (39% to 42%). More pure stockers (36%) and cow-calf stockers (31%) deliver an ionophore through loose free choice mineral than other operation types (20% to 24%).

**Stocker Health Management**

Specific management practices utilized on or after arrival (Q. 34):

*Surgical castration* — 29% say they don’t use the practice. Of those who surgically castrate, 24% do so 2-14 days after arrival, followed by pre-shipment to the operation (22%), on arrival (14%); 15 days or more after arrival (11%).
Non-surgical castration — 35% say they don’t use the practice. Of those who utilize non-surgical castration, 24% do so 2-14 days after arrival, followed by pre-shipment to the operation (15%), on arrival (13%); 15 days or more after arrival (12%).

Tip Horns — 27% say they don’t use the practice. Of those who tip horns, 30% do so 2-14 days after arrival, followed by on arrival (17%); pre-shipment to the operation (12%), 15 days or more after arrival (12%).

Mechanical dehorning — 36% say they don’t use the practice. Of those who dehorn, 23% do so 2-14 days after arrival, followed by 13% for pre-shipment to the operation, on arrival and 15 days or more after arrival.

Chemical dehorning — 87% say they don’t use the practice. Of those who utilize chemical dehorning, 6% do so pre-shipment to the operation; 3% on arrival or 2-14 days after arrival.

Implant — 29% say they don’t use the practice. Of those who implant, 29% do so 2-14 days after arrival, 18% on arrival, 12% 15 days or more after arrival, 9% pre-shipment and 4% at mid-grazing.

Vaccination — Only 3% say they don’t use the practice. Of those who vaccinate, 42% do so 2-14 days after arrival, 32% on arrival, 18% pre-shipment, 11% 15 days or more after arrival, and 5% at mid-grazing.

Deworming — Only 3% say they don’t use the practice. Of those who deworm, 40% do so 2-14 days after arrival, 32% on arrival, 15% pre-shipment, 12% 15 days or more after arrival, and 10% at mid-grazing.

Timing of Various Management Practices

There's little difference in utilization prevalence or timing relative to producer age.
By herd size, more operations with 1-199 head and 200-499 head utilize surgical castration less (30% to 35% don’t use) than operations of other sizes (19% to 25% don’t use). Tipping horns increases with herd size, from 41% of those with 1-199 head not using the practice to 11% for those with 1,000 head or more. Likewise, implanting increases with herd size, from 38% of those with 1-199 head not using the practice to 18% for those with 1,000 head or more. More operations with 1-199 head (45%) and 2,500 head or more (43%) don’t use mechanical dehorning than operations of other sizes (30% to 35% don’t use).

By operation type, feedlot stockers (39% don’t use) utilize surgical castration more than operations of other types (26% to 30% don’t use). More whole-cycle stockers (25% don’t use) utilize non-surgical castration than operations of other types (37% to 38% don’t use). More pure stockers (18% don’t use) and whole-cycle stockers (23% don’t use) tip horns than other operation types (28% to 32% don’t use). More pure stockers (22% don’t use) and feedlot stockers (21% don’t use) implant than other operation types (32% to 34% don’t use).

A similar but separate question (Q. 50) focused on health practices used and timing of application during cattle ownership.

*Antibiotic metaphylaxis* — 45% say they don’t use the practice. Of those who use metaphylaxis, 24% do so 2-14 days after arrival, 23% on arrival, 6% pre-shipment to the operation, 3% say 15 days or more after arrival.

### Antibiotic – Metaphylaxis (Group Tested)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Timing</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pre-shipment to your operation</td>
<td>6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>On arrival</td>
<td>23%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 to 14 days after arrival</td>
<td>24%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15 days or more after arrival</td>
<td>3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mid-grazing</td>
<td>1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Do not use</td>
<td>45%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Use of metaphylaxis decreases as arrival weight increases: 35% say they don’t use metaphylaxis for calves weighing less than 400 lbs., compared to 45% not using the practice for arrival weights of 400-600 lbs.; 52% not using it for cattle weighing 600 lbs. or more.

For those utilizing metaphylaxis on-arrival or mass medication within the first two weeks of arrival (Q. 41), respondents say an injectable antibiotic is used on 41% of the cattle, followed by a feed grade antibiotic mixed into the ration (27%), top-dressing with crumbles or pellets (19%), water medication (7%) and antibiotic bolus (3%).
Also of interest, given regulatory changes between surveys, 88% of respondents say their veterinarians support and write Veterinary Feed Directives (VFDs) for antibiotics such as CTC and OTC when needed (Q.43a).

**Antibiotics-as needed** — Only 6% say they don’t use the practice. Of those who use antibiotics as needed, 52% say they’re used 2-14 days after arrival, 28% on arrival, 25% say 15 days or more after arrival and 7% say mid-grazing.

### Antibiotics (Sick Cattle Only As Needed)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Time After Arrival</th>
<th>Use of Antibiotics</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pre-shipment to your operation</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>On arrival</td>
<td>28%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 to 14 days after arrival</td>
<td>52%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15 days or more after arrival</td>
<td>25%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mid-grazing</td>
<td>7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Do not use</td>
<td>6%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Incidentally, after pulling and treating cattle for BRD, 51% of respondents return them to their home group, while 51% send them to a hospital pen (Q. 48). In 2007, 54% went to the hospital pen.

More producers 65 and older (53%) send cattle to a hospital pen after BRD treatment than other age groups (46% to 47%).

More operations with 1,000-2,499 head (57%) and 2,500 head and more (62%) send cattle treated for BRD back to their home pen than operations of other sizes (47% to 54%).

There is little variation by operation type, although more feedlot stockers (54%) send cattle to a hospital pen after BRD treatment than operations of other types (50% to 51%).

**Clostridial vaccines** — Only 5% say they don’t use the practice. Of those who use clostridial vaccines, 38% say they’re used 2-14 days after arrival, 35% on arrival, 17% say pre-shipment to the operation, 9% say 15 days or more after arrival and 4% say mid-grazing.

### Clostridial Vaccines (Blackleg, 7 way)
**Fly control products** — 16% say they do not use. Of those who use fly control products, 27% say they're used on arrival, 24% say 2-14 days after arrival, 19% say mid grazing, 13% say 15 days or more after arrival and 9% say pre-shipment.

**Fly Control Products**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Fly Control Products</th>
<th>9%</th>
<th>27%</th>
<th>24%</th>
<th>13%</th>
<th>19%</th>
<th>16%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pre-shipment to your operation</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>On arrival</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>2 to 14 days after arrival</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>15 days or more after arrival</td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mid-grazing</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Do not use</td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>

**Implants** — 29% say they don’t use. Of those who implant, 26% say they’re used 2-14 days after arrival, 24% say on arrival, 12% say 15 days or more after arrival and 7% say pre-shipment or mid-grazing.

**Implants**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Implants</th>
<th>7%</th>
<th>24%</th>
<th>26%</th>
<th>12%</th>
<th>7%</th>
<th>29%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pre-shipment to your operation</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>On arrival</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 to 14 days after arrival</td>
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<tr>
<td>15 days or more after arrival</td>
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<tr>
<td>Mid-grazing</td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Do not use</td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>

**Ionophores** — 30% say they don’t use. Of those who use ionophores, 34% say they're used on arrival, 27% say 2-14 days after arrival, 15% say 15 days or more after arrival and 8% say mid-grazing.

**Ionophores**
Coccidiostats (other than ionophores) — 52% say they don’t use. Of those who use coccidiostats other than ionophores, 21% say they’re used 2-14 days after on arrival, 20% say on arrival, 5% say 15 days or more after arrival.

Coccidiostats

Lice/grub control products — 10% say they don’t use. Of those who use lice/grub control products, 35% say they’re used on arrival or 2-14 days after arrival, 10% say pre-shipment and 9% say 15 days or more after arrival or mid-grazing.

Lice/Grub Control

Pasteurella vaccines — 13% say they don’t use. Of those who use pasteurella vaccines, 34% say they’re used on arrival or 2-14 days after on arrival, 15% say pre-shipment, 6% say 15 days or more after arrival.

Pasteurella
Other vaccines (haemophilus, pinkeye) — 20% say they don’t use. Of those who use other vaccines, 29% say they’re used on arrival or 2-14 days after arrival, 12% say pre-shipment and 10% say 15 days or more after arrival.

Other Vaccines (haemophilus, pinkeye)

Probiotics (yeast, bacteria, etc.) — 65% say they don’t use. Of those who use probiotics, 17% say they’re used on arrival and 13% say 2-14 days after arrival.

Probiotics

Injectable viral respiratory vaccines (IBR, BVD, BRSV, PI3) — Only 7% say they don’t use. Of those who use injectable viral respiratory vaccines, 39% say they’re used 2-14 days after arrival, 36% say on arrival, 15% say pre-shipment and 7% say 15 days or more after arrival.

Injectable Viral Respiratory Vaccines

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Intranasal viral respiratory vaccines (*IBR, BVD, BRSV, PI3*) — 40% say they don’t use. Of those who use intranasal viral respiratory vaccines, 25% say they’re used on arrival, 24% say 2-14 days after arrival, 10% say pre-shipment.

**Intranasal Viral Respiratory Vaccines**

Dewormers – One of the highest used products in the cattle market. 39% of the respondents used dewormers on arrival and the same number use them 2 – 14 days after arrival. This lines up well with when cattle are treated.

**Dewormers**

In a separate question (*Q. 51*), respondents were asked if they vaccinate cattle and if not why? All told, 95% of respondents say they vaccinate.

More operations (7%) with herds of 1-199 head say they don’t vaccinate than herds of larger sizes (3% to 5%).

**Of those who don’t vaccinate, 54% say it’s because they have minimal cattle health challenges** and 34% say cattle were vaccinated before purchase. Only 1% said it was because they didn’t believe vaccines worked.
More whole-cycle stockers (70%) cite minimal health problems as the reason they don’t vaccinate than other operation types, from 24% for feedlot stockers to 56% for pure stockers and 55% for cow-calf stockers. More feedlot stockers (53%) say calves are vaccinated before purchase than other operation types (25% to 33%).

Stocker operators continue to provide care to their cattle with little outside assistance. When asked how often they consult their veterinarians (Q. 43), 32% of respondents say a couple of time per year and 23% say only in an emergency, while 22% say they do once each month; 17% say they consult with their veterinarian on every group of cattle.

**Frequency in Consulting a Veterinarian**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Never, I don't use a veterinarian</td>
<td>2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Only in an emergency</td>
<td>23%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Once a year</td>
<td>2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A couple times a year</td>
<td>32%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Once a month</td>
<td>22%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>On every group of cattle</td>
<td>17%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Compared to 2007, 5% more in 2020 say they consult with their veterinarian once a month and 4% more say they consult with their veterinarian on every group of cattle. At the same time, 7% fewer respondents say they consult with their veterinarian only in an emergency.

More producers 65 and older say they consult with a veterinarian only when there’s an emergency (28%) compared to 12% to 18% for other age groups. Also, fewer producers 65 and older (20%) say they consult with their veterinarian once per month, compared to 27% to 28% for other age groups.

Operations with 2,500 head or more (17%) say they consult their veterinarian only in an emergency, compared to 21% to 26% for operations of other size. Also, fewer operations with 2,500 head or more (19%) say they consult with a veterinarian a couple of times per year, compared to 31% to 35% for other age groups. Conversely, more operations with 2,500 head or more (45%) say they consult with their veterinarian once per month than operations of other sizes (17% for herds with 1-199 head to 28% for operations with 1,000-2,499 head).

More feedlot stockers (26%) say they consult with their veterinarian on every group of cattle than other operation types (15% to 17%). More whole-cycle stockers (32%) say
they consult with their veterinarian once per month than other operation types (18% to 22%).

**Stocker Nutrition**

Overall, **stocker nutrition appears to be even more sophisticated** than it was in 2007, with stocker operators utilizing more dry-lot bunk feeding and limit feeding. At the same time, there’s less reliance on cereal pasture and more use of dormant winter feed and warm-season annuals.

Specifically, in 2020 (Q. 13):

- 66% utilize cool-season grass pasture an average of 146 days.
- 53% use bunk-fed forage in a dry lot an average of 143 days.
- 48% utilize warm-season grass pasture an average of 133 days.
- 37% use dormant winter feed an average of 115 days.
- 21% use fall, winter, spring cereal pasture an average of 117 days.
- 15% use warm-season annuals, such as Sudan, an average of 105 days.

Compared to 2007:

- 18% more utilize bunk-fed forage and for an average of 9 more days.
- 13% fewer utilize fall, winter, spring cereal pasture and for an average of 6 fewer days.
- 7% fewer utilize cool-season grass pasture and for an average of 20 fewer days.
- 7% more utilize warm-season annuals planted for grazing, for 19 more days.
- 7% more utilize dormant winter feed, for an average of 10 more days.
- 5% fewer utilize warm-season grass pasture and for an average of 9 fewer days.

Overall, 41% of cattle encompassed by the 2020 survey were limit-fed, versus 35% in 2007 (Q. 55).

**Percent of Stockers for Which Feed Is Limited**

![Bar chart showing percentage of stockers for which feed is limited]
By operation size, percentages of cattle limit fed range from 39% for operations with 2,500 head or more to 43% for operation with 1,000-2,499 head.

By operation type, percentages of cattle limit fed range from 37% for whole-cycle stockers to 43% for cow-calf stockers.

**Stocker Challenges**

For all of the challenges facing agricultural producers in general, and stocker producers, specifically, economic factors lead the pack when it comes to risk factors that could limit the ability to compete over the next five year (Q. 64).

Respondents were asked the level of risk posed by 20 different factors, ranking them on a scale of 1 (low risk) to 5 (high risk). For purposes here, ranks of 4 and 5 are considered high risk.

Factor ranking, based on the percentage of respondents ranking each factor 4 or 5 are: potential return on investment (76%); age or physical limitations (66%); feed costs (66%); weather (60%); land purchase price (57%); other input costs (57%); land lease price (55%); managing price risk (50%); land available for lease (50%); health management costs (49%); cattle health problems (47%); environmental regulations (42%); marketing costs (41%); labor costs (40%); risk management tools for managing price risk (38%); availability of cattle that fit the operation (32%); ability to borrow working capital (29%); procurement cost — not cattle price (28%); urban encroachment (27%).

**Risk Factors for the Stocker Business Next 5 Years**
Age, operation size and type all play a role in perceived risk.

For instance, borrowing operating capital as a risk factor declines linearly by age, from 41% for those 44 and younger to 25% for those 65 and older.

Likewise, more producers 44 and younger (69%) see land purchase price as high risk than other age groups, from 52% for those 65 and older to 63%.

Managing price risk as a risk factor declines by age, from 56% for those 44 and younger to 47% for those 65 and older.

On the other hand, age or physical limitations as a risk factor increases linearly by age, from 12% for those 44 and younger to 80% for those 65 and older.

Generally speaking, for many of the factors, perceived risk grows with the size of the operation. These include managing price risk, cattle health problems, input costs, labor availability and potential return on investment.

In terms of risk variation by operation type, more cow-calf stockers (40%) and whole-cycle stockers (46%) rank labor availability as a high-risk factor than operations of other types (28% to 34%). Likewise, more cow-calf stockers (44%) and whole-cycle stockers (46%) view labor cost as a high-risk factor than operations of other types (28% to 40%).
More feedlot stockers (58%) view managing price risk as a higher-risk factor than operations of other types (49% to 50%).

Fewer pure stockers (41%) score land available for lease 4 or 5 as a risk factor than operations of other types (52% to 53%). Likewise, fewer pure stockers (41%) rank land lease price as a high-risk factor than operations of other types (55% to 60%).

On a related note, respondents were asked the importance of various educational topics to them (Q. 63). They ranked each topic on a scale of 1-5 with 1 being of low importance and 5 being of high importance.

Topic ranking, based on the percentage of respondents ranking each factor 4 or 5 are: feeder cattle prices (91%); nutrition (84%); animal health management (83%); marketing practices (73%); impact of stocker practices on beef quality (65%); borrowing money/accessing capital (55%); cattle procurement (55%); establishing contractual relationships with buyers (54%); basis (53%); trends in land values (52%); establishing contractual relationships with suppliers (45%); retaining employees (45%); environmental regulations (40%); finding employees (37%).

### Availability of Various Educational Topics/Resources

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Topic</th>
<th>5 - High</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>1 - Low</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Feeder cattle prices</td>
<td>50%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nutrition</td>
<td>36%</td>
<td>37%</td>
<td>21%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Borrowing money (access to capital)</td>
<td>39%</td>
<td>28%</td>
<td>18%</td>
<td>6%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Animal health management</td>
<td>30%</td>
<td>36%</td>
<td>25%</td>
<td>6%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marketing practices</td>
<td>25%</td>
<td>36%</td>
<td>26%</td>
<td>6%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cattle procurement</td>
<td>28%</td>
<td>27%</td>
<td>28%</td>
<td>9%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Impact of stocker practices on beef quality</td>
<td>21%</td>
<td>29%</td>
<td>33%</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Basis (difference between cash &amp; futures prices)</td>
<td>22%</td>
<td>25%</td>
<td>29%</td>
<td>13%</td>
<td>11%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Establishing contractual relationships with buyers</td>
<td>21%</td>
<td>23%</td>
<td>31%</td>
<td>11%</td>
<td>14%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trends in land values</td>
<td>20%</td>
<td>23%</td>
<td>34%</td>
<td>11%</td>
<td>11%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Establishing contractual relationships with suppliers</td>
<td>18%</td>
<td>24%</td>
<td>32%</td>
<td>12%</td>
<td>14%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Environmental regulations</td>
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<td>38%</td>
<td>12%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Retaining employees</td>
<td>14%</td>
<td>20%</td>
<td>27%</td>
<td>12%</td>
<td>26%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Finding employees</td>
<td>8%</td>
<td>13%</td>
<td>26%</td>
<td>21%</td>
<td>32%</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

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