

## Background and justification

During 2004, the department of Agricultural and Applied Economics at the University of Wyoming conducted a small pilot survey of 400 cattle producers within Wyoming. The purpose of the survey was to identify and examine cattle industry trends and cattle production practices within the State as well as the attitudes, and perceptions of Wyoming's beef cattle producers toward emerging industry trends and potential new production practices. This pilot study forms the foundation for a larger, comprehensive survey of Wyoming cattle producers that will be conducted in 2005.



Events such as the recent drought and changes in agricultural markets and national policies have had significant impacts on the way Wyoming farmers and ranchers conduct their businesses. Significant market changes include: consumer demand for organic goods, which rose throughout the 1990's by more than 20 percent, consumers' increased concern towards food safety, their health, lifestyles and values, e-coli bacteria and Bovine Spongiform Encephalopathy (BSE) threats within the food supply, development of rural land into residential areas as well as drought and environmental concerns.

Wyoming agricultural producers are challenged by this changing industry. Ranchers must be competitive to remain profitable and there are many possible production changes that ranchers could adopt to improve their profitability, for example: producing organic beef; feeding different feed sources; changing the timing of the calving season or diversifying the existing operation among others. The production changes ranchers are willing to adopt depends in part

on their attitudes, perceptions, structural factors, and the economic potential of new practices in comparison to existing practices.

Ranchers are likely to adopt new practices or change the management of existing enterprises if they are confident that these changes will increase the profitability and long term



economic sustainability of their business.

Variability in the size of individual operations, management ability and other factors will influence the ability of ranchers to change their management. New enterprises that could be profitable for some ranchers might not be profitable for others.

## **Survey Methods**

Four hundred Wyoming cattle producers were randomly selected by the National Agricultural Statistics Survey in Cheyenne. Each of these producers were sent a survey by mail that asked questions about their general ranch description; their production and marketing practices and their demographic information. Two hundred and seventy two surveys were sent to producers that had less than 300 cattle, 104 surveys were sent to producers with between 300 and 1,000 cattle and the remaining 24 surveys were sent to producers with more than 1,000 cattle.