

CATTLE FINISHING RETURN

S E R I E S

April 2012

CATTLE FINISHING NET RETURNS

This article discusses recent trends in feeding cost of gain and cattle finishing profitability. Several sources of data were used to compute the cattle finishing net return series discussed below. Feeder and fed cattle prices were obtained from the seasonal cattle price spreadsheet updated monthly by Kevin Dhuyvetter. Average daily gain, feed conversion, days on feed, in weight, out weight, and feeding cost of gain were obtained from monthly issues of the *Focus on Feedlots* newsletter. Interest rates were obtained from the Kansas Federal Reserve Bank of Kansas City.

Figure 1 presents monthly steer finishing net returns from January 2000 to March 2012. It is important to note that net returns were computed using closeout months rather than placement months. Net return per head for 2011 was approximately \$0 compared to a net return per head for 2010 of \$52, and losses of \$105 and \$117 per head in 2008 and 2009, respectively. Net losses in January, February, and March of this year were \$60, \$3, and \$20, respectively.

Figure 2 illustrates fed price and breakeven prices from January 2000 on. The breakeven prices starting in April 2012 are forecasted. Breakeven prices for April through June closeouts are expected to range from \$131 to \$134 per cwt. At these breakeven prices, losses per head are expected to exceed \$100 per head. Breakeven prices for July through September closeouts are expected to range from \$134 to

\$137 and for October to December closeouts from \$131 to \$134. It is important to note that breakeven prices are highly dependent on the corn market, which has been highly volatile in the last few months. As noted below, feeding cost of gain is expected to fall below \$100 towards the end of year.

Correlation coefficients can be used to examine the relationship between net returns, feeding cost of gain, and the feeder to fed cattle price ratio. Correlation is a statistical measure of how variables move together and is bounded by -1.0 and 1.0. A value of -1.0 indicates two variables move together perfectly, but in opposite directions, while a value of 1.0 indicates two variables move up and down together proportionally. Values close to zero indicate two variables have little relationship to each other.

Net returns are significant and negatively correlated with feeding cost of gain ($r = -0.216$). Figure 3 illustrates monthly feeding cost of gain from January 2000 to March 2012. Feeding cost of gain has been above \$100 per cwt since August of 2011. Feeding cost of gain for the second and third quarters of 2012 is expected to range from \$104 to \$109 and \$100 to \$104, respectively. During the last quarter of the year, feeding cost of gain is projected to range from \$95 to \$100. Feeding cost of gain is sensitive to changes in feed conversions, corn prices, and alfalfa prices. Regression analysis was used to examine the relationship between feeding cost of gain and feed conversion, corn prices, and

alfalfa prices. Results are as follows: each 0.10 increase in feed conversion increases feeding cost of gain by \$1.03 per cwt, each 0.10 per bushel increase in corn prices increases feeding cost of gain by \$1.11 per cwt, and each \$5 per ton increase in alfalfa prices increases feeding cost of gain by \$0.33 per cwt.

Net returns are also significant and negatively correlated with the feeder to fed cattle price ratio ($r = -0.818$). The strong correlation between these variables reveals the importance of this price ratio to net returns. The feeder to fed cattle price ratio is illustrated in figure 4. The average price ratio since 2000 is 1.16. Of course, it is not possible to fully anticipate what fed cattle prices will be when purchasing feeder cattle. Large deviations from the mean price ratio indicate periods for which expected and actual fed cattle prices were quite different. The closeout months with ratios below 1.00 exhibited cattle net returns averaging \$178 per

head while the closeout months with ratios above 1.40 exhibited cattle finishing losses averaging \$163 per head. The feeder to fed cattle price ratios during the first quarter of 2012 averaged 1.08. The feeder to fed cattle ratio for April through June closeouts is expected to range from 1.19 to 1.24, which is above the long-run average. This relatively high ratio is certainly contributing to the expected large losses.

This article discussed recent trends in feeding cost of gain and cattle finishing net returns. Net return information for beef cow and backgrounding operations is available on the Kansas Farm Management Association web site (www.agmanager.info/kfma).

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Figure 1. Historical Net Returns for Finishing Steers
Source: Michael Langemeier, Kansas State University

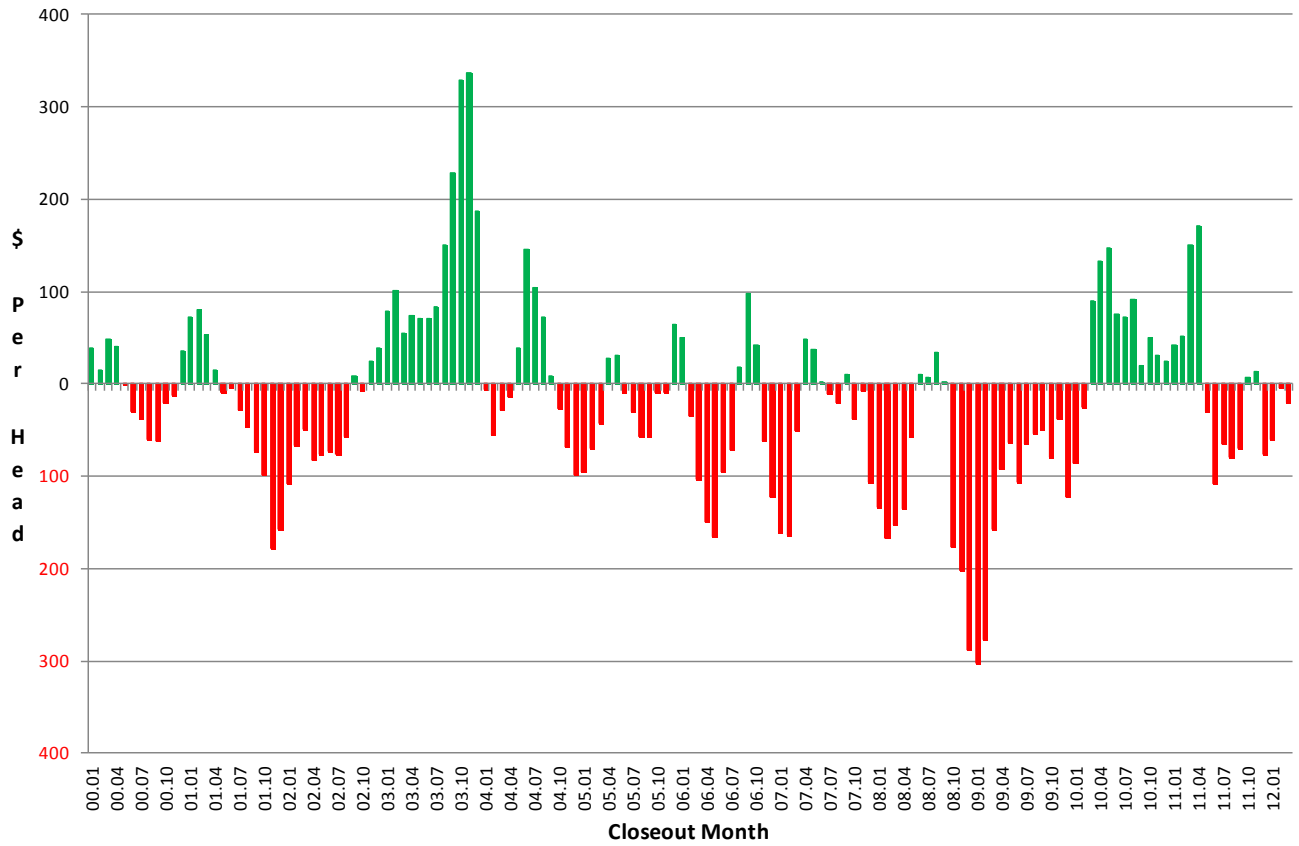


Figure 2. Fed Cattle and Breakeven Prices
Source: Michael Langemeier, Kansas State University

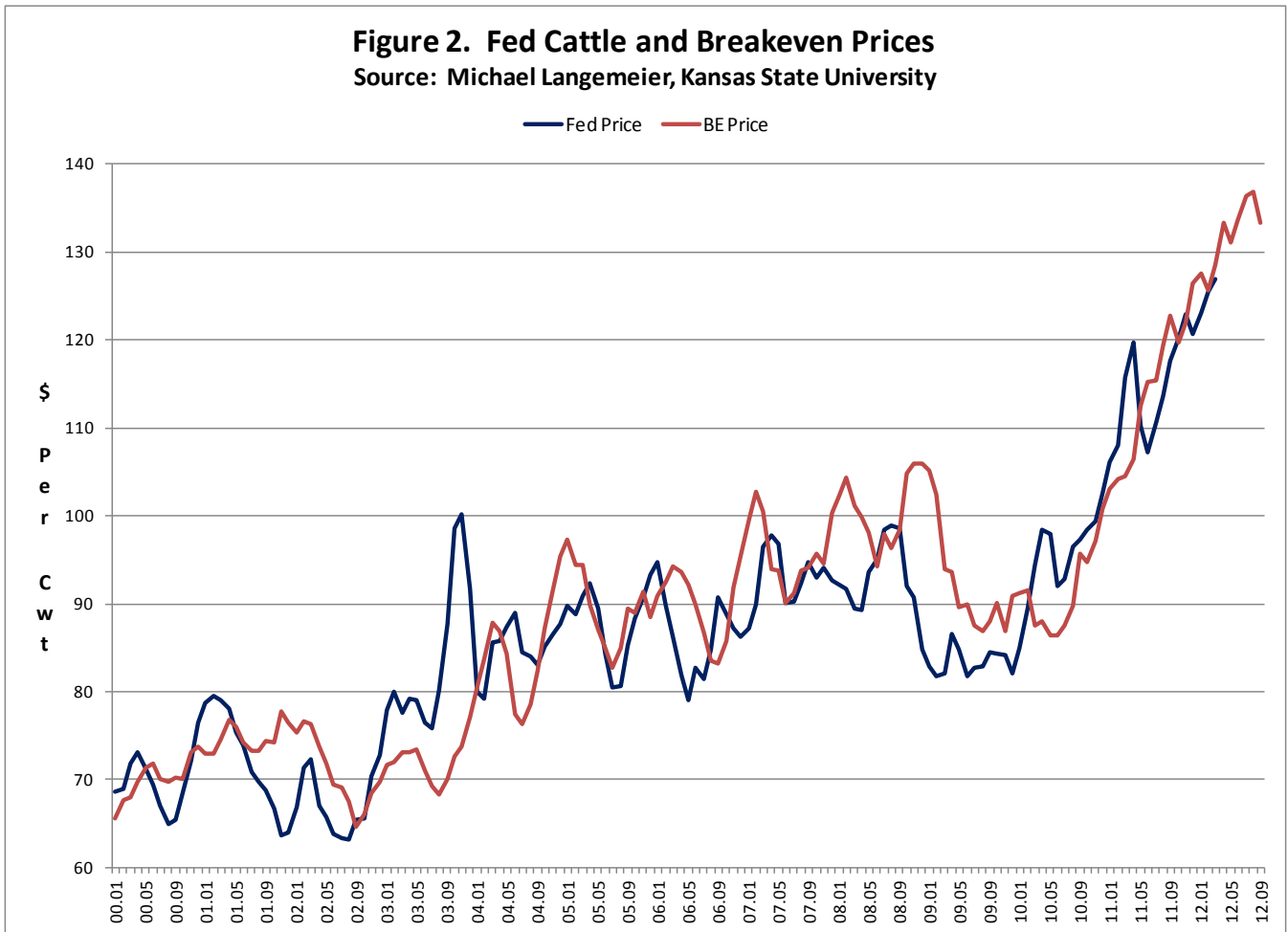


Figure 3. Feeding Cost of Gain for Steers

Source: Focus on Feedlots Newsletter

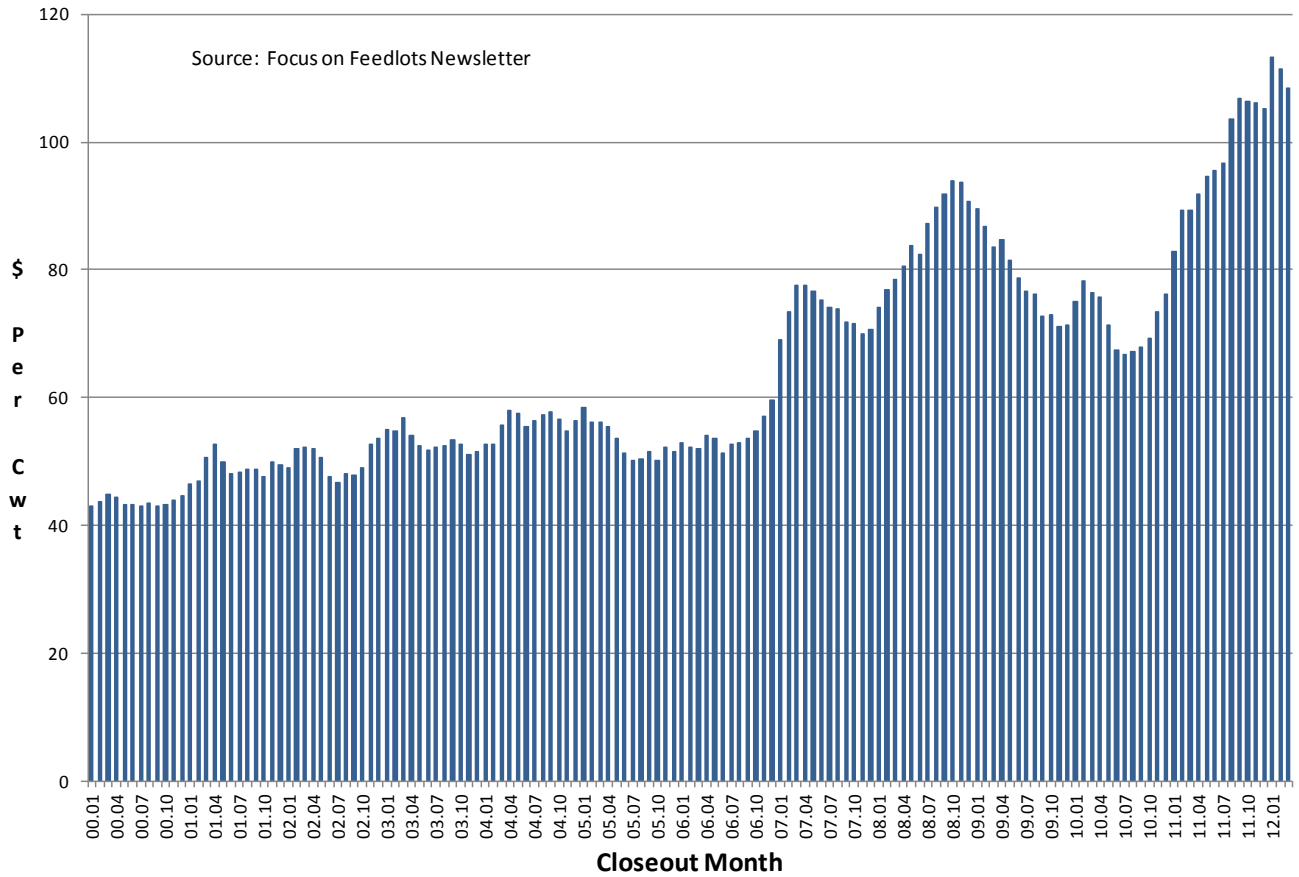
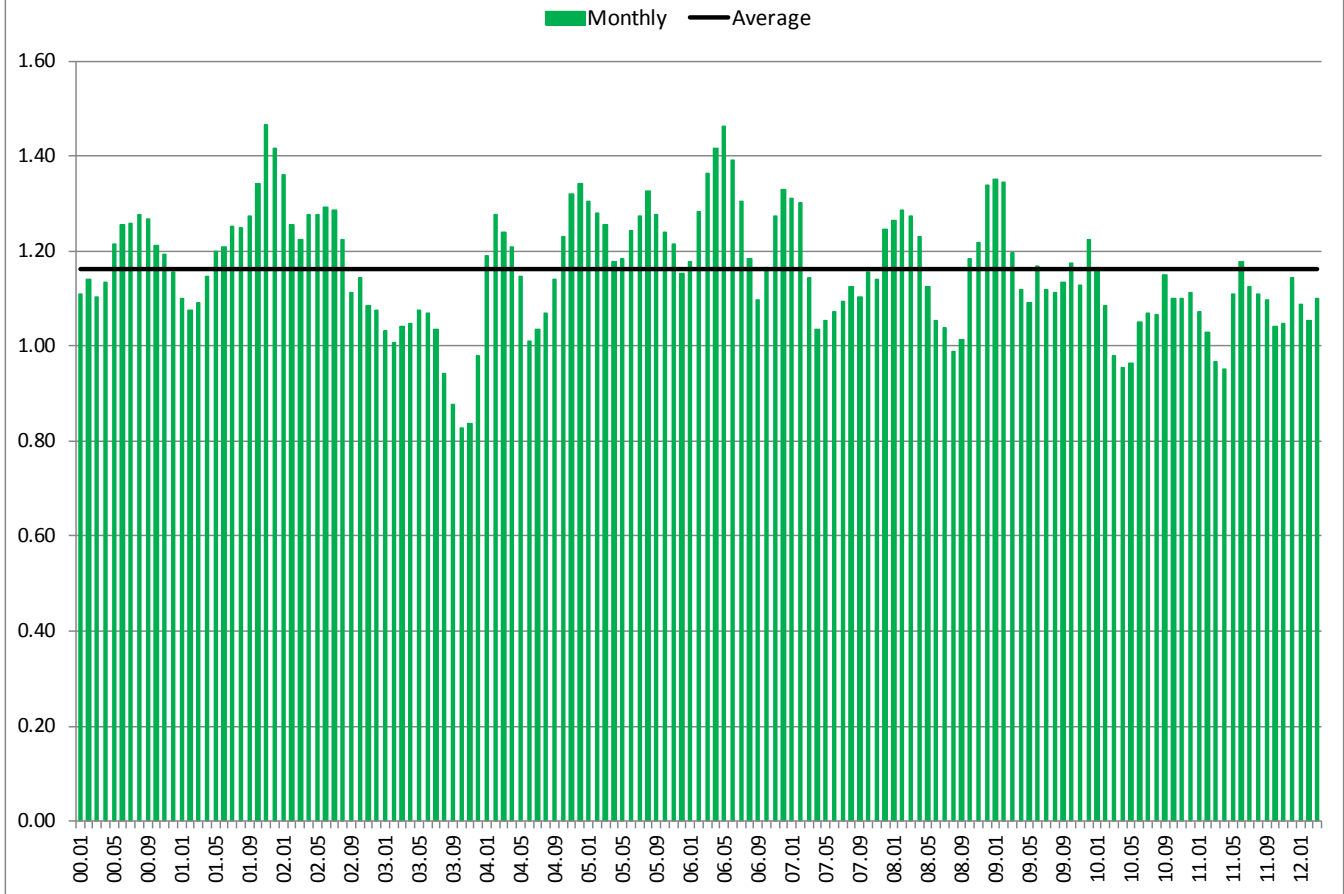


Figure 4. Ratio of Feeder Prices to Fed Cattle Prices



The Cattle Finishing Returns Series is distributed monthly to provide information to farm decision makers. Further information can be found on the Extension Agricultural Economics website: www.agmanager.info.



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