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Overview of Beef Farming in New Zealand

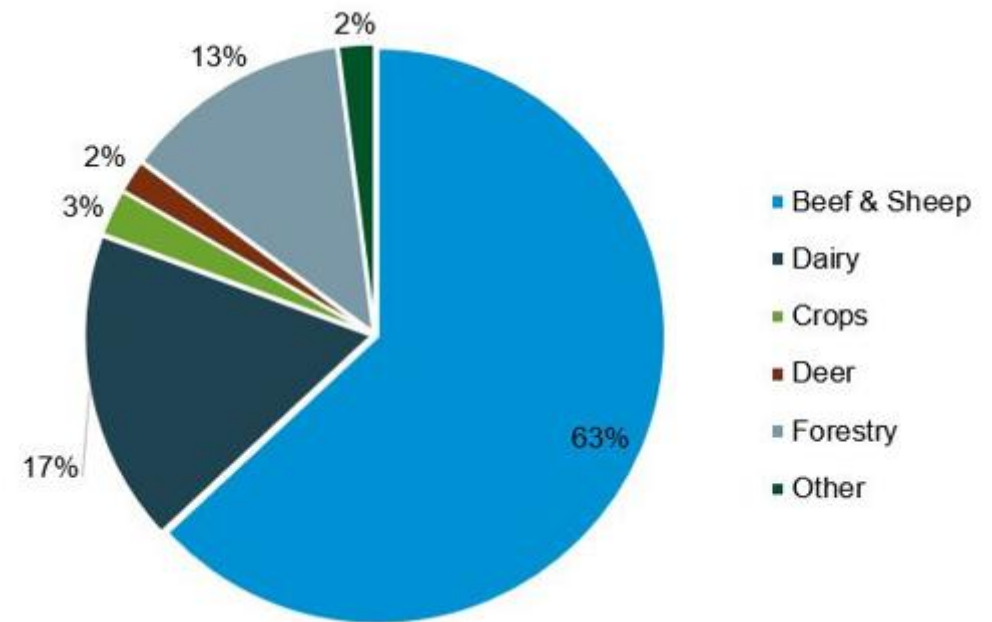
Beef cattle

Beef cattle numbers are approximately 3.8 million in 2023 of which about 1 million were beef breeding cows and heifers. 70% of total beef cattle were in the North Island. Few farmers devote themselves exclusively to beef production. In general, the raising and finishing of beef cattle is carried out in conjunction with sheep farming.

In addition, beef is produced from cull dairy cows, calves and raising young bulls to produce bull beef.

Most of beef breeding and finishing in New Zealand occurs on the North Island. The warmest and wettest parts of the North Island create favourable conditions for pasture growth and cattle improve the condition of the pasture for sheep.

There are 22,005 sheep & beef farms utilising 8,266,000 hectares , 63% of land in agriculture.



Unique Features of the New Zealand Beef industry

- About 95% of beef is pasture fed
- There is a great diversity of breeds with the dairy industry contributing a significant proportion of production.
- Most beef cattle are run on hill country having given ground to dairying and intensive sheep systems on the easier more highly productive rolling and flat areas.



Beef and Sheep Farmed Together

In New Zealand, beef cattle and sheep are usually farmed together as they are complementary to one another with respect to pasture management and animal health, especially under hill country conditions.

The New Zealand climate supports year-round pasture growth, and this is the key to sheep and beef cattle production with over 95% of the diet being grazed pasture or whole crop.

It is this efficient, sustainable and relatively low-cost system of pasture production that allows New Zealand to compete globally as a major exporter of food and fibre. Today sheep and beef cattle production are the dominant land uses in terms of land area, utilising 63% or 8.2 million ha of New Zealand's grazing land.



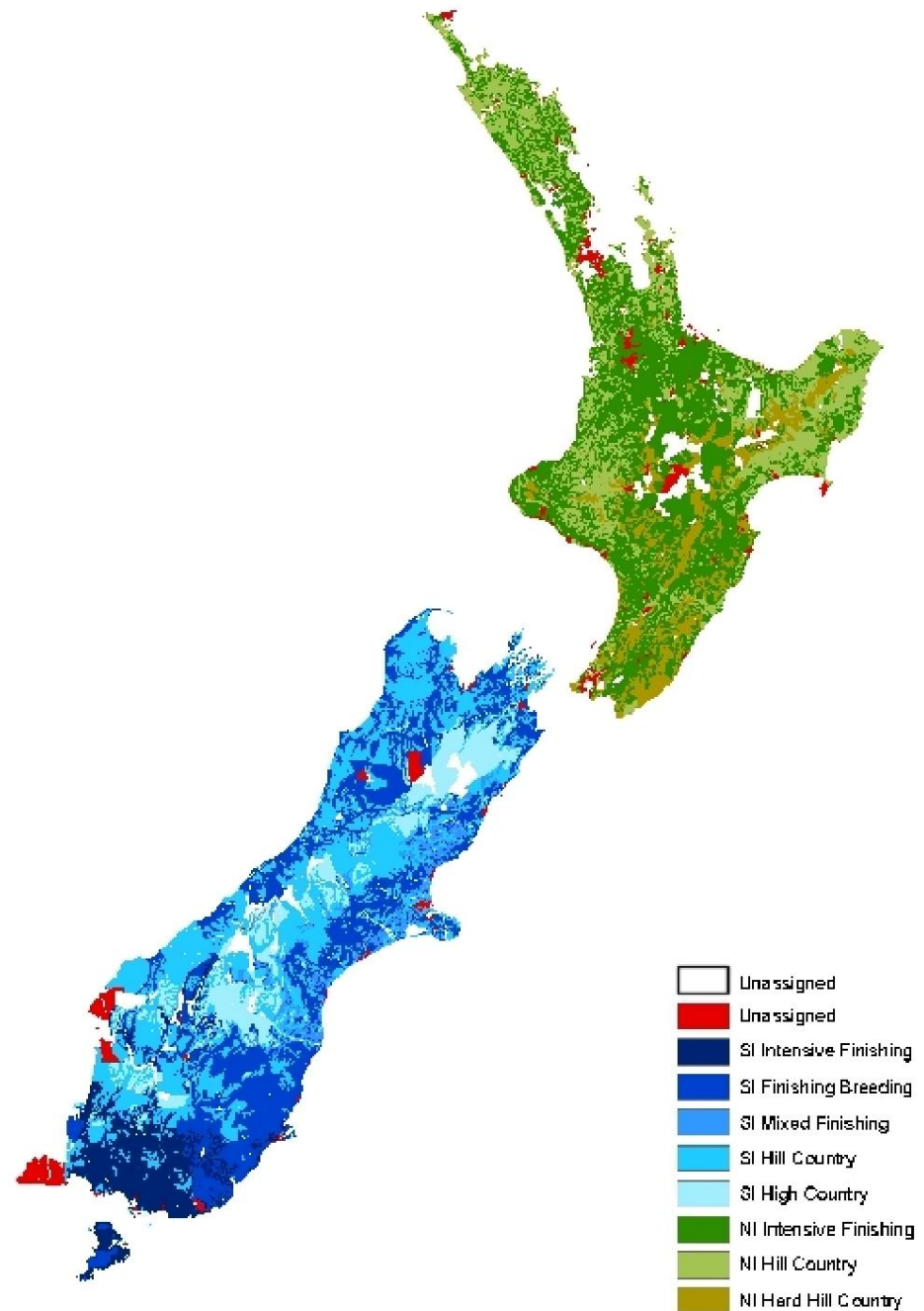
Sheep and Beef Farming Systems

Sheep and beef farming is found in many regions throughout New Zealand.

They are predominantly found on easy to steep hill country in both Islands.

The summers are dry and winters are cold, limiting pasture growth.

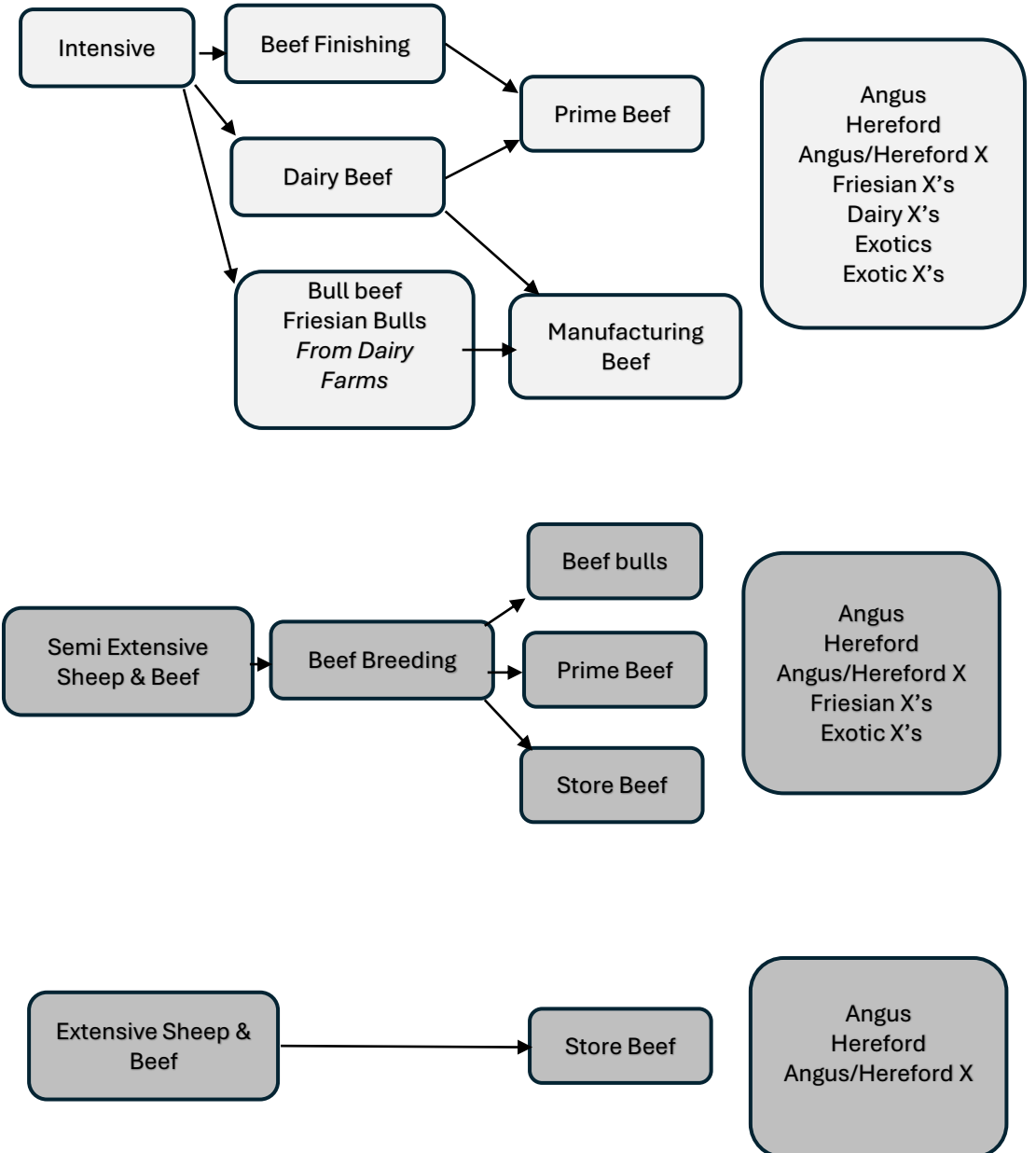
High country sheep and beef farms are found in the central South Island. The climate is dry in summer, cold in winter with periods of snow.



Beef Cattle Farming Systems

There are two main beef cattle farming systems

- Beef breeding cows - usually found in the hill country farms in the North Island (extensive and semi extensive farms)
- Growing / finishing beef cattle - occurs on lowland farms with high quality pasture (intensive farms and flatland on semi extensive farms)



Beef Farming Systems

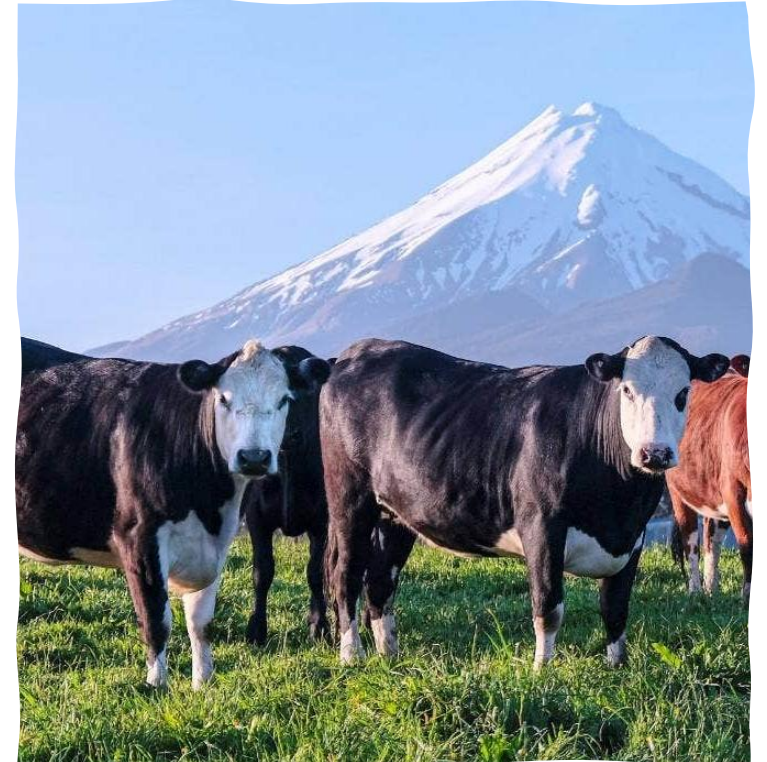
Extensive



Semi- extensive



Intensive finishing



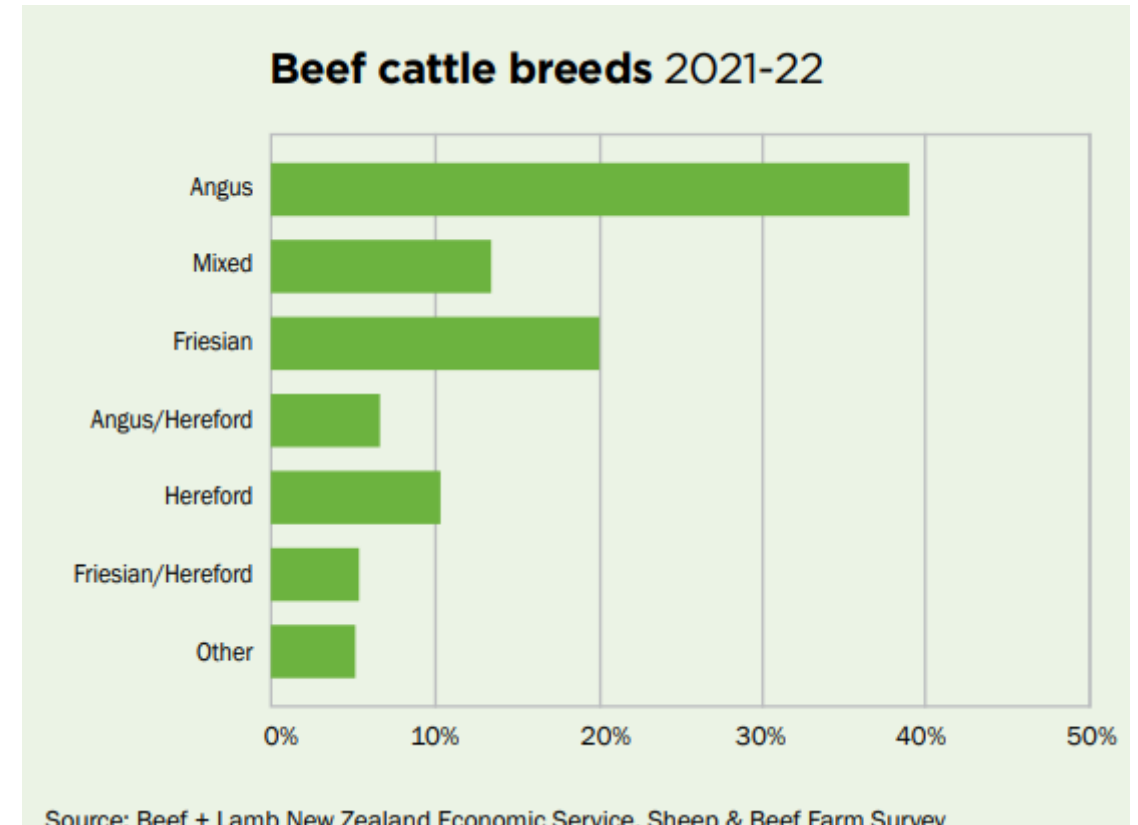
Beef Cattle Breeds on Pastoral Farming Production Systems

| | | | |
|---------------------------|---------------|--|------------------------------|
| Beef Cattle Breeds | Main Breeds | Angus Hereford Angus Hereford cross Dairy Beef (Friesian cow X Beef bull) | Extensive - Intensive |
| | Exotic Breeds | Limousin Belgium Blue Simmental Charolais Wagyu | Semi – Extensive - Intensive |

Beef Cattle Breeds

Of the one million beef breeding cows and heifers in New Zealand, it is estimated that 38% are Angus, 10% Hereford and 7% Angus x Hereford. Angus and Hereford crosses also contribute to a specific group of 14% classified as mixed crosses. Friesian make up 20% while Friesian crossbreds make up 6% of the beef cow herd, “mixed” make up a further 14% and 6% of other breeds make up the rest.

The main breeds in beef breeding herds are Angus, Hereford and Angus–Hereford crosses. In large breeding cow herds, another breed of bull, such as a Simmental or Limousin, might be mated with older cows, which can produce heavy calves that return a premium when sold.



Beef Cattle Breeds

Angus



Hereford



Angus Hereford Cross



Simmental



Friesian Bulls



Friesian / Hereford Cross



Dairy Beef



Dairy Beef Providing Opportunities for Farmers

Dairy beef animals are those animals born in the dairy industry and sold for beef production.

Dairy beef animals are animals sired by beef and born to dairy cows and are either raised or sold for beef production.

The New Zealand dairy herd contributes to beef production directly through the supply of Friesian and crossbred bull calves to beef cattle finishers.

Dairy beef crossbreeding programs are helping to optimise the utilisation of dairy calves, contributing to the growth of the country's beef industry.

Watch [Dairy Beef Integration](#)



Specialist Bull Beef Farming

The main beef production system utilising dairy-bred calves is the Friesian bull beef finishing system.

Friesian bull calves are either sold at four days of age to specialist calf rearers or sheep and beef farmers or reared on dairy farms to 10-12 weeks of age before being sold at the dairy-beef weaner sales.

Friesian bulls grow fast on pasture and producing lean and tasty meat.

Bulls are normally sent to the freezing works between 18-24 months of age and used mainly for leaning processing or ingredient beef.



Beef

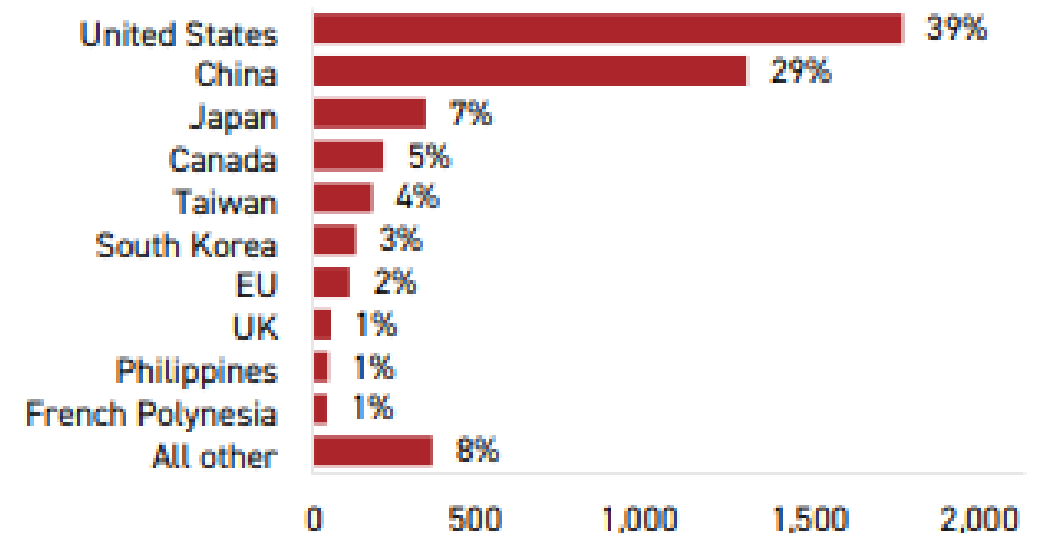
Approximately 80% of all beef produced in New Zealand is exported. The domestic and export trade are generally separated. Export meat is processed through licensed export plants while meat for the domestic markets is processed through domestic abattoirs.

The US and China are our biggest markets for grass feed beef.

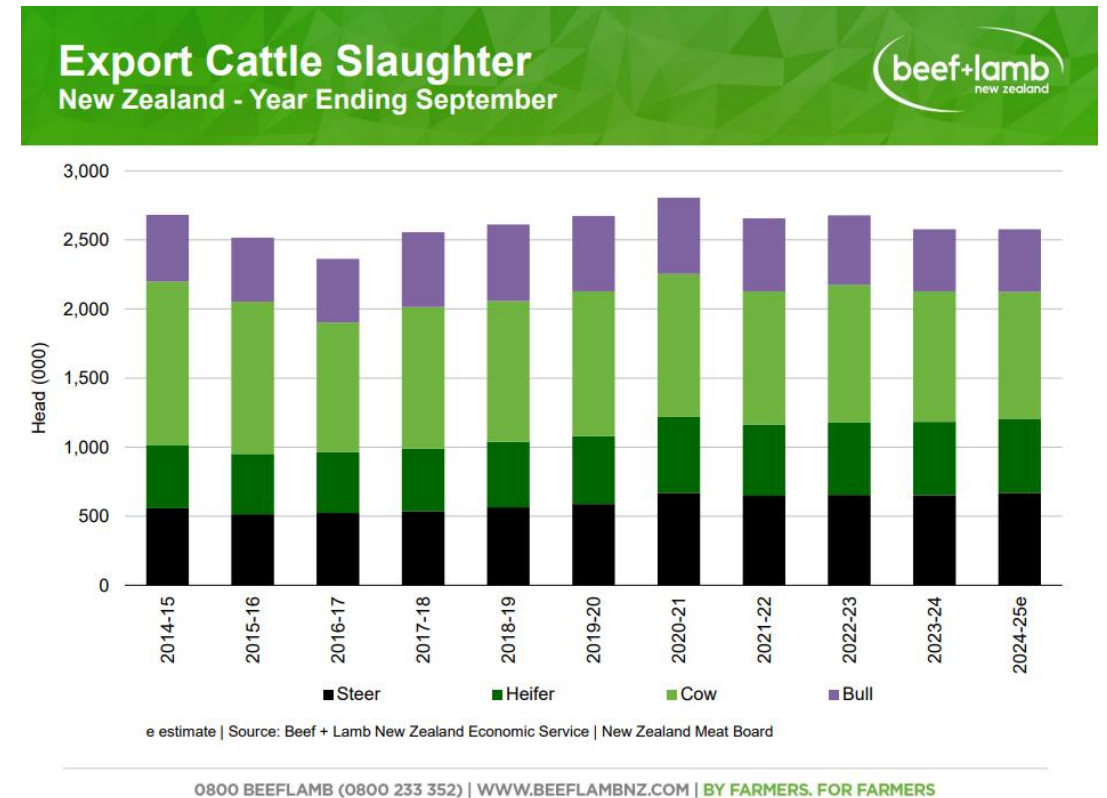
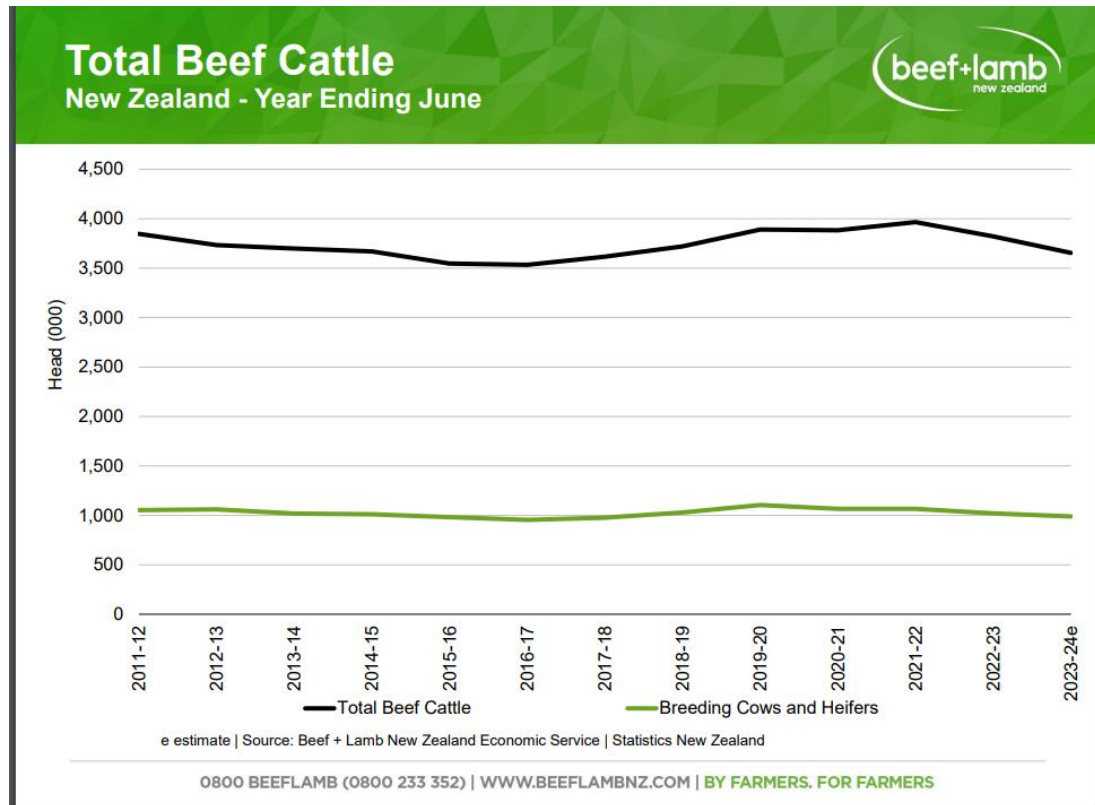
- The US is a key market for manufacturing beef which is made into ground meat, a key ingredient for beef patties.
- China is a key market for high quality prime beef.
 - Prime beef - usually from steers or heifers but some prime cuts are taken from bulls
 - Manufacturing beef - from bulls and cull cows and the fore quarters of steers and heifers.



Beef and veal



Beef cattle numbers and slaughter trends



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