#24-BC July 2025

British Columbia 2024 Benchmarks

In 2025, the COP Network launched a second round of data collection. This new phase began with 2024 production data from British Columbia (B.C.) and Ontario (ON). Data for the seven British Columbia benchmark farms was sourced from the *2024 10-Year Update of the Costs and Returns of Sample Ranching Businesses in Various Areas of British Columbia*.

Five key criteria were required for a farm to be included in the B.C. benchmark study:

1. The sample ranch had to be realistic and plausible for its region, serving as a representative example rather than an extreme or average case.
2. It needed to be designed in a way that allowed participants to assign logical and defensible production and economic parameters.
3. The scale of the ranch had to be viable, though it was recognized that off-farm income might be necessary depending on the location.
4. The ranch was expected to reflect important geographic and climatic features typical of its region.
5. It had to meet internal consistency standards for comparison and discussion.

What is the COP Network?

The Canadian Cow-calf Cost of Production Network (COP Network) uses standardized data collection which allows for comparison both within and between provinces, and internationally. Since launching in 2021, the COP Network has collected data from over 235 producers contributing to 64 cow-calf benchmark farms that represent various production systems. Each benchmark is based on data from 3-7 producers. Data collection occurs every 5 years with annual indexing of input and output prices, as well as crop and forage yields, in subsequent years. Individual benchmark farm summaries, can be found at: https://canfax.ca/resources/cost-of-production/cop-results.html

There are differences in methodology between the B.C. study and the COP Network. The B.C. study reported metrics and per-head costs based on the number of cows wintered, while the COP Network reported based on the total cow herd. Operator labour was not included as an expense in the B.C. study, whereas the COP Network assigned a value of $25/hour for unpaid labour, with hours adjusted by herd size (i.e., hours per head decrease as herd size increases).

In terms of land reporting, both the B.C. study and the COP Network excluded rented grazing acres from the total reported land base but included rental costs under grazing and private pasture fees. Depreciation also varied: the B.C. study reported lower depreciation costs (3% on buildings and 5-10% on machinery),

while the COP Network applied a 10% depreciation rate for machinery, 5% for buildings, and included 25% of the house value under building depreciation.

Farm Descriptions

The new B.C. benchmark farms were drawn from the *2024 10-Year Update of the Costs and Returns of Sample Ranching Businesses in Various Areas of British Columbia*. These farms continue to represent the six original ecoregion benchmarks but now include a seventh benchmark for the Vancouver Island ecoregion. The current benchmark farms are designated as BC-1 through BC-7.

Across all seven benchmark farms, cow herd sizes range from 24 to 460 head, with an average of 234 cows per herd. When BC-7 is excluded—due to its significantly smaller herd size of 24 cows—the range shifts to 174 to 460 head, with an increased average of 269 cows per herd. The smaller scale of BC-7 contributes to notably higher costs per cow.

All farms calve between February and March. Calf weaning generally occurs in October, except for BC-1, which weans in November. All operations retain only replacement heifers. Regarding winter feeding, five out of seven farms rely exclusively on homegrown hay and greenfeed, while BC-4 and BC-6 use both homegrown and purchased feed. Winter feeding durations range from 135 to 229 days, with an average of 182 days.

Figure 1. Farm details for new B.C. benchmark farms[1]

[1]Calving month is based on the month that the benchmark farms started calving

Five of the seven farms generate some income from selling surplus hay production. However, this revenue remains a minor component of their overall financial structure—BC-5 derives 14% of its income from hay sale, while the other four farms with hay revenue report contributions of 5% or less.

Benchmarks

All B.C. benchmark farms were able to cover their cash costs, while six out of seven also covered depreciation costs. However, only two of the seven farms were able to cover opportunity costs. On average, these farms achieved medium-term profits of $313/cow per cow after covering cash and depreciation costs, but fell short on opportunity costs, which averaged a deficit of $219 per cow.

Cash costs ranged from $982 to $1,537 per cow, with an average of $1,143. Depreciation costs ranged from $115 to $897 per cow, averaging $296. Opportunity costs ranged from $262 to $1,032 per cow, with an average of $532. As a result, total costs ranged from $1,419 to $3,466 per cow, averaging $1,971 (see Figure 2).

As noted in the study, BC-7 reported substantially higher costs per cow, primarily due to indirect costs and depreciation being spread across a much smaller herd. Small operations like BC-7 often rely on additional income sources to remain viable. Many small farms in the region are supported by off-farm income and have diversified into complementary enterprises such as field vegetable production, agri-tourism, food processing, and direct farm marketing to boost overall revenues.

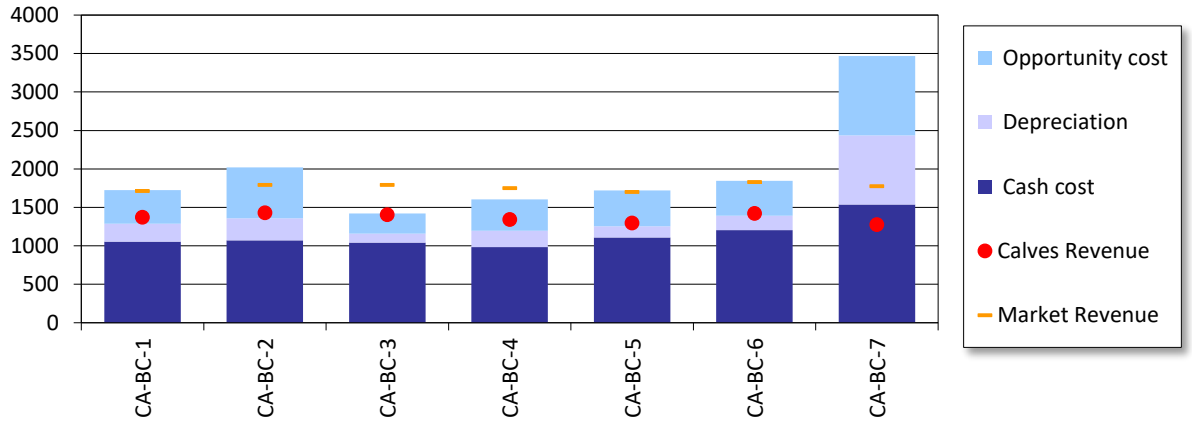

Figure 2. Cost of Production for each individual benchmark farm

Market Revenue = Receipts from calves, calves transferred to backgrounding enterprise, cull animals and breeding stock
Calf Revenue = Receipts from calves and calves transferred to backgrounding enterprise

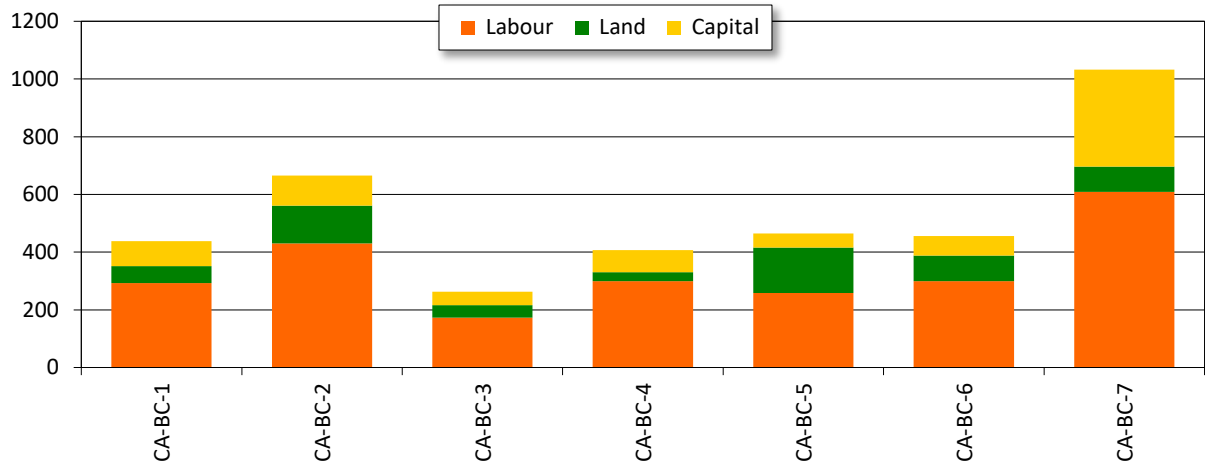

Figure 3. Breakdown of land, labour and capital for each individual benchmark farm

Annual Trends

In 2024, Eastern Canada experienced an increase in cash costs, while Western Canada showed signs of stabilization, with costs moving sideways. In B.C. the average cash cost per cow in 2024 was $1,143—making it the third-highest among all surveyed provinces.

B.C. experienced a steady upward trend in cash costs from 2020 to 2023, followed by a slight decline in 2024. Over the five-year period, cash costs increased by an average of $63 per year, ranging from $42 - 138. But from 2023 to 2024, there was a modest $12 decrease, bringing the 2024 average to $1,143 (see Figure 4). Overall, B.C. saw a total increase of $252 in cash costs per cow over the five-year period from 2020 to 2024.

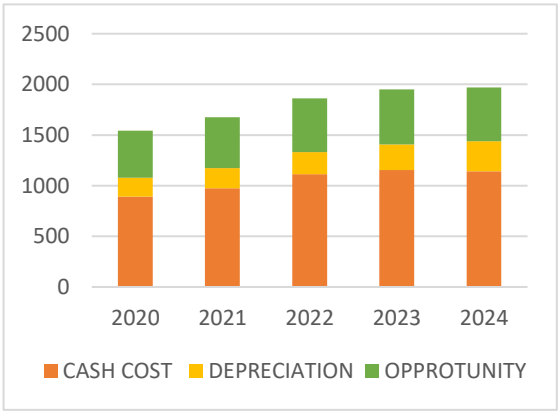

Figure 4. BC cash, depreciation and opportunity costs from 2020-2024

Depreciation costs have had an average annual increase of $27 per cow, with a total increase of $109 per cow. Opportunity costs have had an average annual increase of $17 per cow, with a total increase of $66 per cow.

For more information, on ways to stay competitive check out the other COP Network Fact Sheets at [Cost of Production Analysis - CanFax]