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Pet Industry Rivals Livestock in Size

THE NEXT TIME you go to the supermarket and conclude that meat is expensive think about this bit of information from the U.S. Department of Agriculture:

More than 85 million households in the United States own at least one pet. There are millions of commercial livestock on farms and ranches. The livestock industry is estimated to be an \$80 billion business. The pet industry also is estimated to be an \$80 billion business.

We spend as much each year on the care and feeding of pets as we do on animals that make up a major part of our food supplies.

This data will appear in the USDA's 1984 Yearbook of Agriculture titled: "Animal Health: Livestock and Pets." It is now going to press and will become available to the public in January, either free from members of Congress or by purchase from the Superintendent of Documents, Washington, D.C.

The book covers just about all of the familiar species of the animal kingdom: Dairy and beef cattle, sheep and goats, swine, catfish,

trout, tropical fish, other aquatics, poultry and pet birds, cats and dogs, horses, rabbits and smaller animals.

It appears that all animals great and small have both health and dollar equality in the eyes of the USDA.

There is some overlapping of categories. Horses, for example, used to be regarded as farm animals, but tractors and motor bikes have transformed them mostly into hobbies or pets. Catfish and trout may be considered both commercial and sport animals but not pets.

What has been called "The Great American Animal Farm" has had a population explosion. Since 1972 the number of dogs and cats Americans own has increased from 60 million to close to 100 million and 61 percent of all households keep some kind of pet.

There are 139 breeds of dogs and 31 breeds of cats that consume 9 billion pounds of food a year at a cost of \$4.5 billion. Pet owners spend another \$4.6 billion on veterinary services.

That beats keeping tigers or ele-

phants. An adult tiger is said to consume 25 pounds of horsemeat daily, costing \$3,650 a year. It costs about that much to keep an elephant supplied with hay. Goldfish and turtles don't each much, but they're not much company, either.

People keep pets for a lot of reasons and companionship is one of them.

There is a surplus of city pets to match whatever farm surplus there may be of commercial livestock. When folks moved out after the western Oklahoma oil boom went flat, pets sometimes became "excess baggage," leaving a surplus of stray dogs and cats in several communities.

USDA inspectors guard against unauthorized importation of animals and products which might bring in diseases and enforce laws requiring humane care for animals transported or kept in zoos.

The objective of the USDA book is to help owners take good care of their animals, whether commercial livestock or pets.