

News Release
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For: Around the County

Production Records for the Cow/Calf Enterprise

Making management decisions in any business without some records is risky. On the other hand, keeping useful records takes time. In the cow/calf segment one of the biggest issues is time, but this should not be an excuse for not fulfilling your role as a business manager. Computers and software programs designed specifically for the cow/calf producer have made this task much easier. It is important to understand, from a management standpoint, that production records need to be combined with financial records to determine the profitability of the cow/calf enterprise. There is a large volume of data that would indicate that cow/calf enterprises with the largest weaning weights or highest net calf crop are not always the most profitable.

The key to developing a good record-keeping system is identifying the key production traits that you need to collect which will result in the information you will use when making management decisions. Producers should tailor their record keeping system for their specific needs. Collection of irrelevant data can prevent meaningful evaluation and may not be time or cost effective. The lack of collecting enough information can result in not identifying problem areas which could be costly. Any record-keeping system requires time and commitment. Data must be gathered on a consistent basis so meaningful comparisons can be made. The data must then be evaluated so that sound management decisions can be made. For example, weaning weight can be increased by purchasing a bull with high expected progeny difference (EPD) for weaning weight. However, if the operation experiences increased calving difficulties and lower pregnancy rates, the purchase probably wasn't profitable. Producers must record all events before in order to determine the full effect.

If you as a manager are not currently keeping records on herd performance, a good starting point may be to collect some basic information to measure production efficiency and inventory

numbers. These numbers can be recorded and calculations can be made using a pocket calculator or they can be kept on a computer software spread-sheet program. A January 1 inventory of cows, bulls, calves, and replacement females would be some good numbers to record. If you are doing a financial enterprise analysis, these numbers will also be used to determine unit cost of production. If you are keeping an inventory of cow numbers, it may be beneficial to record the number of two-year-olds, three-year-olds, and mature cows. To measure production efficiency, record the number of cows that enter the breeding season, the number of cows that calved and the number of cows that wean a calf. With these numbers, you would be able to determine pregnancy rate, calving rate, weaning rate, and net calf crop. To calculate these measures of efficiency, there would need to be adjustments for pregnant cows and pairs sold or added to the breeding herd to get accurate numbers. You may want to record the numbers mentioned above by age of dam. In other words, record the number of replacements heifers being bred for the first time, the two-year-olds being bred for the second time, and the number of mature cows. Net Calf Crop is an important production calculation and is the number of calves weaned divided by the number of cows in the breeding pasture to produce those calves times 100. What if Net Calf Crop Percentage is 87%? Is that good or bad? If the numbers are available to break Calf Crop Percentage down by age of female, then it can be determined if there is a certain age group of cows influencing Net Calf Crop Percentage. If that is the case, then management changes can be directed toward that group of females instead of the whole herd. The key is that the information is available to make a change without guessing as to the cause of the performance.

When using a computer cow/calf recording-keeping software program, the producer can keep more individual performance information. With individual records also comes a commitment by the ranch to identify all females and subsequent calves in the herd.

The amount of information that can be retrieved from the computer programs is almost endless. There are number of computer software packages available to keep individual and herd

records. Many times, there is a demo package of the software that can be down-loaded or supplied so that you can look at the program before making a purchase. Make sure it has the SPA Guideline calculations and produces the information that you want. In addition, make sure that there is good technical support if you have questions or problems after the program has been purchased.

With the spring calving season approaching it is a good time to think about management consideration and records to collect. Besides identifying the calf, it will be important to be able to document the age of the calf. The minimal information that needs to be collected in the up-coming calf crop is 1) ear tag number, 2) date of birth, 3) sex of calf, and 4) color marking of the calf that could be used for identification. As a form of permanent identification, tattooing new-born calves may be the best or a semi-permanent ID might be to double tag new-born calves or a combination of a tag plus a clip-tag. Being able to track animals is going to be important from an animal health perspective. It is also important to record the start of the calving and the end of the calving season.

Consider how records can add value to your calf crop and marketing opportunities as well as helping you make more accurate management decisions. Will these records help in allowing your calves to be marketed into a "source and verified" program or some other program that increases profit potential of the cow/calf enterprise.