

Beef talk 755: Got the Calving Book Handy?

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Data needs to start somewhere. In the cattle business, it starts with the calving book. The calendar probably will have some notes on it for those once-yearly events. For instance, bull turnout, weaning, cattle sales, branding and calf workings are all examples of annual events.

These dates are critical, so they need to be noted and recorded. The dates are transferred into a permanent record so if a producer ever needs to look back, the actual dates are available.

Actual written information is key to keeping track of the processes that are involved in managing a cattle operation. Through the years, the mind tends to selectively remember various activities and fold them into one, so what the mind recalls may not be the same as what is written on a sheet of paper and tucked away in a record book.

Speaking of a record book, the other book that needs to be kept is the calving book. That is a book that is field-ready and simple to use to record the events of the day as the cows are calving. Many producers already do keep a calving book, but the statement is not a simple one.

Through the many years of interacting with cow-calf producers, one very difficult topic is the keeping of individual records of calves. Even just noting the dates that calves were born or died on a daily bases would be an excellent place to start.

The individual identification of calves is desired. However, tagging, recording and transferring the data is not simple. The process implies that there are people available and a working office is ready to receive the calving records.

The concept of a complete calving book is simple. A calving book is a book that allows producers to write down the tag number they put in the calf to record the date of birth as close as possible. Most calves are fairly accessible for tagging within 24 hours of birth if the new mother is in agreement.

Cows that recently have calved have initiated a hyped-up defensive mechanism and certainly will take on any possible danger to the newborn calf, including the producer, so care is required.

Actually, most producers could write several good book chapters about their experiences with working and tagging newborn calves. There often is a feeling of security with what may appear to be a stable piece of equipment, such as a tractor, pickup or utility vehicle, until one experiences the presence of an upset mother cow sitting next to you in the pickup. The day generally goes downhill after that.

Most producers consider themselves fairly agile and reasonably fast, but when paired with an agitated mother cow, one may need to ratchet it up a notch to extremely fast. With age, producers naturally slow down, so the ability to get out of the way diminishes.

One would think I was trying to talk myself out of keeping a calving book, but seasoned wisdom and an investment in good equipment will make the feat possible. Once the tagging process is figured out, the actual recordkeeping involves entering the birth date and individual tag number in the calving book, plus other notes about the calf and cow.

The other point is cow disposition: Those cows that have no intention of maintaining your well-being should be sold. Excuses don't mean much when one is laid up or, worse yet, disabled.

This would be a good time to make a note to cull those cows with disposition problems. Although some ranchers will make a pretty good argument for maintaining those cows that are overprotective of their calves because these cows also will ward off predators.

However, risking one's health dealing with those cows is something one should think twice about before accepting aggressive behavior. It is not just the producer; it also involves the producer's family, friends and co-workers who could become an unknowing victim of an aggressive cow.

Back to the calving book. Depending on what the producer wants to remember about the calf but doesn't want to convert to memory, the rest of the calving book is filled out. The more typical data recorded is the mother's tag number, sex of the calf and perhaps a notation on birth weight, calving ease and miscellaneous comments.

The most important item is the calf tag number and date of birth. Obviously, without the mother's tag number, no performance data can be gathered. Each individual producer ultimately has to make those decisions.

Start simple, keep the basic records and learn to use them.

May you find all your ear tags.

Your comments are always welcome at <http://www.BeefTalk.com>.

For more information, contact the NDBCIA Office, 1041 State Ave., Dickinson, ND 58601, or go to <http://www.CHAPS2000.com> on the Internet.

Starting a Herd Performance Program

1. Calf identification

2. Identifying the mother

3. Date of birth

4. Sex of calf

5. Weight of calf

