

BeefTalk: Data are the Foundation for Developing Cattle Goals

Data help guide farm and ranch decisions.

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Farm and/or ranch decisions usually are based on two choices: data or “gut feeling.”

Choosing the latter means choices that essentially drift with the beef industry because “gut feeling” is a product of comfort within the beef industry environment. For cow-calf producers, comfort within the business is good.

And along with comfort, the cow-calf enterprise shifts with the gradual changes within the industry. Essentially, individual production is pulled toward industry average, thus the commodity business.

The real challenge comes when a producer wants to take the reins and maneuver the cow-calf enterprise in a direction set by the producer, not the industry. This requires data on which to base decisions and formulate new goals.

So, was the decision correct? What was the consequence to the business? Those questions are the fundamental reason beef producers gathered and formed associations to help guide and collect data for the genetic improvement of cattle.

Since 1985, I have worked with the North Dakota Beef Cattle Improvement Association (NDBCIA), an association with a focused mission to improve cattle. The producer-members were adamant that the data generated be correct and presented so producers could use and understand the data. The outcome was the beginning of CHAPS, a records program offered as a service of the NDBCIA and North Dakota State University Extension.

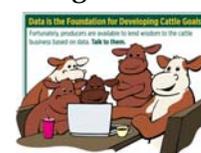
The acronym CHAPS means Cow Herd Appraisal Performance Software. CHAPS has been utilized worldwide for 30-plus years.

The CHAPS program assists producers in reviewing herd data, providing a quality and depth of business sense within the cow-calf sector. In fact, if a bad day presents itself, all I need to do is think about the many, many producers I have the enjoyment to work with, and what was bad can become insignificant.

The CHAPS facts and figures can be extensive. The herd analysis reports pretty well tell the story. The “Herd Summary” starts with a quick review of the number of cows exposed, total cows kept for calving, number of cows aborted, number of cows open, number of cows calving, number of cows losing their calf and the number of cows weaning calves.

The actual written inventory numbers are a huge step for beef producers entering the world of production records. Step one always is to count the cows, calves and bulls. Once the inventory is known, step two calculates values for traits that give producers a quick assessment as to the general reproductive and production status of the herd.

Images



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