



BeefTalk 526: Five Key Points to Calf Records

SUPPORTING MATERIALS

Starting a Herd Performance Program

1. Calf identification
2. Identifying the mother
3. Date of birth
4. Sex of calf
5. Weight of calf



Producers who maintain information and performance records have one notable advantage versus those who don't.

Fall is, depending on where one lives, the time to process calves. As producers, fall also is the last time we physically have the calf in our possession. We need to take the time to note or record the information we would like to have for each calf.

Most calf data sets start with five points. These points are calf identification, the mother of the calf or cow identification, calf birth date, sex of the calf and calf body weight. These points are the foundation of all calf data among those active in the beef business.



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The calving book is the starting point because cow and calf identification, calf sex and birth date are recorded at birth. The data are the foundational data that allow a calf to be age and source verified.

Calf weight is a measure of productive output, and the date it is taken will vary from operation to operation. However, a weight measurement around 7 months of age is the goal.

In addition to the five basic points, additional fall data, such as calf frame score (calf height) and other comments regarding selected calves, could be collected. Comments are seldom, if ever, incorporated into a data base. However, through the life of a cow, those comments certainly will bring back memories and, if frequent enough, may be considered during a management review.

These comments also can lead to formulating contemporary groups (calves that are all raised under similar conditions) and placing a code on each calf designating the respective contemporary group to which the calf should be allotted.

If one reviews typical calving book data, calf birth weight and calving ease are recorded and can be inputted into the

ranch record system. Information that may not be collected directly from the calf but is known about the calf, based on breeding information or other records available, could be the sire of the calf and age of the cow.

Cow age may not be an obvious data need, but most producers realize that heifers, second-calf heifers, younger cows, mature cows, old cows, ancient cows and, eventually, broken-toothed and gummer cows all have different needs. The level of output will vary a great deal based on the age of the cow. The sire of the calf will help evaluate sire selection and the value of the sires utilized within the herd.

The process seems so simple. If you believe that, you never have ear tagged a calf or convinced a new mother that her calf really does need to be weighed. However, these challenges are not significant enough that one should cast aside herd performance data without at least pondering both sides.

Producers who maintain information and performance records have one notable advantage versus those who don't. They know where they are. They do not need to have someone tell them where they are, and they can evaluate the pros and cons of each managerial input within their herd. They are not swayed by fads, opinion or other novel approaches destined to cure all their ills. These producers are in control; they manage and they know.

Not all herds need to maintain the same type of data, but regardless of what data are kept, even a little is better than none. Ultimately, the cow is the producing unit and the key to a successful cow-calf operation. The cow is available in many breed types that vary in size, milk production and the ability to add on condition. Without any knowledge of her production output, she quickly can become a production freeloader. She even may learn a little self-preservation by being missing on evaluation days.

The bottom line: Spend some time reviewing the year's production and riding the pastures. Go one step further by writing down a few thoughts.

Last week, an invitation arrived in the mail for a pasture tour of a producer's calves. What a nice thought. The calves will be leaving when the fall marketing chain is set in motion. Seldom, as a producer, will one have quiet time again with this year's production.

Pick a day, work those calves at your own pace, enjoy a cup of coffee or two and do some pondering as to what's up for next year. When the time is right, incorporate those thoughts into a herd production record program that will help you evaluate your thoughts for this year and for years to come.

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.

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