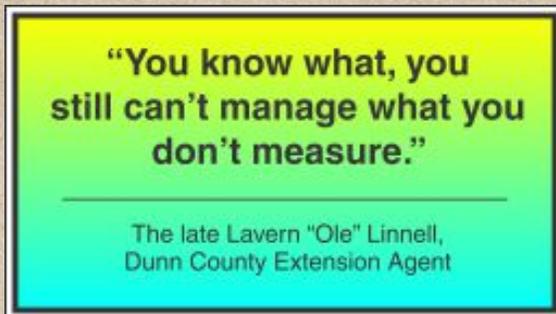




BeefTalk 727: Records, a Positive Opportunity

SUPPORTING MATERIALS



Not all success is associated directly with meticulous recordkeeping, but those who keep records with factual-based goals certainly will have less positive or negative surprises.

As summer appears to be waning and fall soon will be upon us, I can remember a former co-worker, Harlan Hughes, saying; "You can't manage what you don't measure."

The meaning never changes. The statement is true because you can't manage what you don't measure. As producers prepare for another weaning season, I certainly hope they will

not bypass the opportunity to record in writing factual data about their beef operation.

As the world seems to move faster, one of our human weaknesses is the tendency to go with "gut instinct" and forgo the collection of meaningful data. There always is the option to read what everyone else is doing and then simply assume that the data also applies to one's own operation. These assumptions, again a product of our human weakness, tend to assume the best.

However, much like school, all students are on the honor roll until after the first test. Life is no different. In this case, the test is production and financial performance.

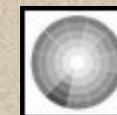
Not to date myself, but following graduation from North Dakota State University in the fall of 1975, I weighed my first calves in Ramsey County for the North Dakota Beef Cattle Improvement Association. So after almost 40 years of encouraging producers to "measure what they need to manage," I quickly can reference many herds that excel in beef production.

Those herds that are managed well have been able to capitalize and convert beef to dollars during some good times in the cow-calf segment of the industry. The financial advantage of the current upturn in calf prices and subsequent opportunity for increased positive net returns in the cow-calf business have proven to be real.

Granted, not all success is associated directly with meticulous recordkeeping, but those who keep records with factual-based goals certainly will have less positive or negative surprises.



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The North Dakota Beef Cattle Improvement Association started in 1963, so why don't all producers record and track individual cow-calf data? I'm sure the reasons are many. Time and cost probably are at the top of the list. Labor translates into time and is not easy to find. Historically, most labor was homegrown and supplemented with neighbors. Unfortunately, the labor pool is decreasing.

On a positive note, with increased revenue, the opportunity to offset labor with better equipment is real. Now would be a good time to look around at some equipment dealers to see what might be available. Electronic ear tags, Bluetooth technology, wireless connections and more chute-side rugged scale heads have made the job of tagging, vaccinating and weighing calves manageable.

It just takes a little more reading and perhaps a little time to get everything plugged in. Under those conditions, I would have no trouble putting that scale in the chute and collecting the performance data needed to evaluate the cows.

However, let's take a look at reality during the upcoming fall season. Many producers have cattle spread 30 to 50 miles between pastures. Depending on the price and availability of grass, the distances could be even greater.

For the center, a cattle work day means the crew is loading horses by 5 a.m. and, depending on the pasture, rounding up cattle by 6 or 7 a.m. If all the cattle are where they are supposed to be, they should be arriving just as the chute setup work is being completed, the electronic scale has been calibrated and the day's objectives reviewed.

If all goes well, the cattle should be worked by noon and the semitrucks loaded with this year's high-valued calves destined for the weaning lots. The mother cows will have been turned back to grass until time permits to bring them home. That is called work.

As in any business, as a manager, what work gets done and what work is set aside is a decision that generally is driven by cost and return. If you are going to do it right, weaning calves is hard work, and many days don't go exactly as planned. Bad weather, mechanical breakdowns, temperamental cattle and tired crews don't help.

I have shared in this scenario for almost 40 years and the work does not change. However, producers have changed. Those whose goal is to move forward have done so with the incorporation of solid records to substantiate production and financial performance, and reset futuristic goals for the next decade.

Why? Because, as the late Ole Linnell, former Dunn County Extension agent would say, "You know what, you still can't manage what you don't measure." Ole knew the truth, so I believe him.

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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