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## **BeefTalk: Use Technology to Make Management Decisions**

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Technology and how it works has been the subject of beef cattle management rhetoric for the past decade. It continues to fascinate all of us as we look for ways to process data faster, more accurately--and ahead of the rest of the beef industry.

Beef has been and still is a commodity, a product of forage and grain. Traditionally, cattle are managed as groups (a commodity) with average performance values assigned to individuals within a group. (For example, if the value of a pen of three calves is \$1,500, each calf is reported to be worth \$500. In reality, each individual calf in the pen of three may be worth \$600, \$500 and \$400; or \$600, \$600 and \$300; or \$700, \$500 and \$300; or any other combination that adds to \$1,500.)

With only the average value of \$500, no managerial changes can be implemented to increase the percentage of calves of greater value. Managerial decisions that were associated with the individual performance or values can not be identified.

Technology to the rescue. If a producer wanted to more appropriately manage the inputs going into each calf, the

producer could call on electronic cattle management which would allow individual tracking of animal performance (and subsequently the animal's family.)

Commodity cattle management only allows managers to relate value back to an individual management decision when the decision involves the group being evaluated. With electronic cattle management, producers can monitor, evaluate and implement the desired managerial changes. At the NDSU Dickinson Research Extension Center, data collected in the past six calf crops has driven decision making.

In 1994, the DREC started searching for improved data collection techniques from birth to harvest. The first set of cattle that was electronically managed and source verified from conception left the center in 1996. The net loss on dead calves was \$612.19, that of sick poor doing calves (realizers) was \$124.68. The net return for normal calves was \$49.13. Treatment costs were \$14.07 for calves that died, \$4.94 for realizers and \$1.27 for normal calves.

How? Which? What? I needed some answers. How does the center improve the percentage of normal calves (the high value calves)? Which ones were the problem calves? What do we do?

The electronic data indicated those calves with a lower percentage of crossbreeding had treatment costs of \$2.46 versus those calves with a greater percentage of crossbreeding of \$1.25. Perhaps the level of crossbreeding influenced the death loss. Those calves born in March/April had treatment costs of \$1.64 (0.7% death loss) and those born in May/June had treatment costs of \$2.38 (4.8% death loss). Time of birth also influenced the death loss.

The center could implement two managerial changes based on these data. May/June calves need more time to acclimate and perhaps an additional vaccination protocol prior to shipping. Cross breeding should be maintained when selecting bulls.

As is often the case, correctly handled and processed electronic data support sound management principles. As with most producers, seeing is believing.

May you find all your ear tags.

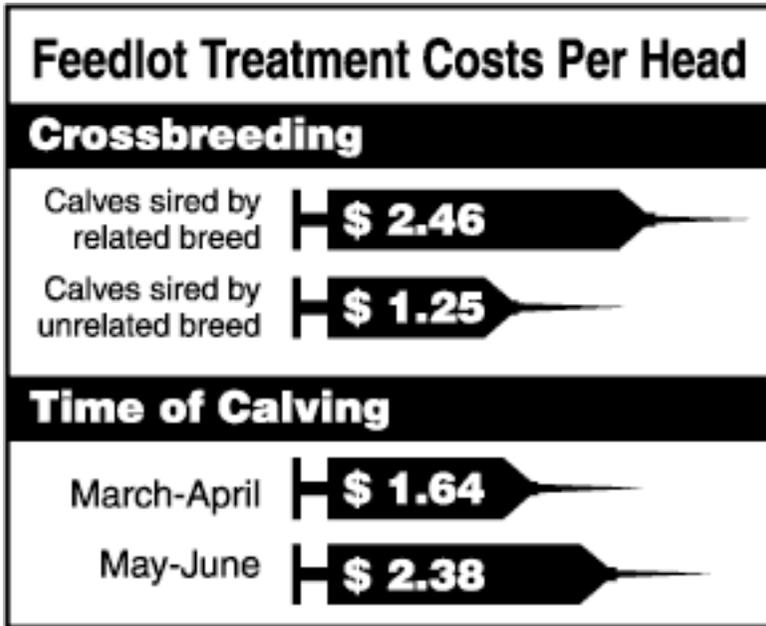
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Improvement Association, 1133 State Avenue, Dickinson, ND 58601 or go to [www.CHAPS2000.COM](http://www.CHAPS2000.COM) on the Internet. In correspondence about this column, refer to BT012.

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