

## **BeefTalk 471: The Simpler the Better**

*If you want to know how much something weighs, weigh it.*

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At one time, a tag and scale were all the tools needed to start a beef cattle production record system. The tag was placed at birth and the mother and birth date were recorded in the free notebook from the local livestock business.

Come fall, the calves were gathered up. The weights were written in the notebook and the calves were shipped.

Using this method, beef cattle record associations evolved. Many have become history, but others have gone on to advance the beef industry.

This simplicity is important to remember. Today's producers face a much more demanding world that is complicated by an array of acronyms or other assorted abbreviations and half-done directions.

Short, abbreviated words are good, but if the local vernacular (the spoken language) does not include the term, the abbreviated words become an obstacle to learning. However, it never hurts to learn, even if the process may seem somewhat frivolous.

In the world of beef, the newer DNA sciences are bringing us numerous terms that may be unfamiliar. It brings more frustration as one combines these terms with the many facets of age and source verification that interact with a multitude of different companies.

In the end, the phrase "the simpler the better" probably sums up the process best. There are so many new things popping like popcorn that it is difficult to keep things simple, but one should try.

In beef production, the principle trait is weight. The ability and/or time that it takes an animal to gain weight is an overriding factor in the business. The composition of that weight is important, too. However, the weight itself generally takes precedence, assuming that the cattle that are being weighed are typical, normal cattle.

The golden rule that continues to apply says, "If you want to know how much something weighs, weigh it." Weight is the foundation of any beef record system that is designed to improve production.

The early beef improvement groups formed the foundation and underpinning of data collection today. While the traits have expanded, the number of times a trait may be measured has increased and even a few new traits have arrived, but the calves still need an ear tag and scale to walk across.

The information is valuable, so the more documented records you have available for each cow, the better equipped you are to make bold, decisive decisions about culling, selection and mating systems. The managerial decisions you make today can have a huge impact on the future of your herd for many years to come.

As an aggressive cattle producer competing in today's complex beef market, you need to utilize all the tools available to reduce guesswork. This will add predictability to your herd performance. Various programs are available. For example, the North Dakota Beef Cattle Improvement Association developed CHAPS 2000 (Cow Herd Appraisal Performance Software) in the mid-1980s and still utilizes the program.

Commercial cattle producers are encouraged to keep the process simple. Those that have not been involved in a performance and managerial evaluation before need to make a giant leap and identify their cows and calves with an identification system of ear tags or freeze branding.

Once the cows and calves are identified, the minimum records for an effective program include cow and calf identification, cow age, calf birth date, calf gender and weaning weight and date.

While that seems simple, we all know that is not true. Cattle are difficult by nature, so trying to convince them to get on a scale and cooperate is another story.

However, now is the time to contact the North Dakota Beef Cattle Improvement Association or similar organization and send in all that good data that rests in the calving book.

If you did not keep a calving book, now is the time to make a resolution to get one for next year.

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.

