

Record Management Software for Cow-Calf Producers

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What do you measure and how do you use the information? This question is something every producer has faced at some point and each has a different approach to answering it. To effectively make decisions on the ranch producers should maintain at least basic records on their cow herd and use these records to assist in the management of the herd. But how far do you go? Some measure everything with hopes that the more information they have will allow them to better manage the herd, some measure almost nothing claiming the cost of measuring and analyzing the records is not worth the benefit.

Measure only what you will use

When deciding whether to start or continue taking a measurement ask yourself this question:

What will having this information allow me to do and what benefit will that action have?

If the benefit is not worth the cost in your time, cost of additional equipment, wear on facilities and stress on the cattle, then don't take the measurement! At some point this cost and benefit will change for different measurement so re-evaluate often.

What should most producers measure?

You need information to manage. If you're not taking some basic measurements and figuring out some basic information then you're likely missing important information to effectively manage your operation. Remember that these numbers are for your use only. Often producers think the information their banker or accountant ask for is the only information they need to make management decisions. However the information the banker and accountant receive are often targeted to meet your goals with each audience. The information you collect for management purposes should be structured for you.

The following table is what I consider to be the minimum information that should be measured. This table and the associated goals are derived from work done by Harlan Hughes with data from herds participating in the CHAPS program in North Dakota.

Measurement	Definition	Goal
Pregnancy rate	Number of females bred/number of females exposed	>98%
Culling rate	Number of females culls/total number of breeding females	12-14%
Calving rate	Number of calves born/number of females exposed	>95%
Weaning rate	Number of calves weaned/number of females exposed	>91%
Calf death loss	Number of calves died/total number of calves born	<7%
Average weaning weight		>550
Pounds weaned per exposed female	Total pounds of weaned calf/number of exposed females	>500
Total feed cost per cow	Total feed costs/exposed female	<\$200
Total direct and overhead costs per cow	Total costs/exposed female	<\$310
Unit Cost of production	Total costs/total lbs sold	<\$0.70
Calf weight/Cow weight	% of calf weight in proportion to cow weight	
205 day weight over cow's productive life	Rate you cows on the average 205 day weights of calves they have produced	

How to record and analyze this information:

The software I am presenting is one way to record and calculate this information. This software will not meet the needs of every operation and there are many other software packages that will do a great job and be much more detailed than the one I'm presenting. You can always record and calculate this information without the use of a computer, but a computer should make the process much easier. The important step in record keeping is to make it part of your daily routine and develop a simple and effective way to record the information you need. A pocket red book, or note book is a great tool but at some point you must pull the information out of this book into some type of summary that you can use to make decisions. Chances are that someone involved with your ranch is a good record keeper and handy with a computer. At the next ranch business meeting have a discussion with your team on what items you need to record and assign a person the task of developing your record management system. Everyone will need to keep records, but having one person summarize these records and report back will simplify the process.