

Management

Why Keep Records on Your Cow Herd?

By John Paterson, Executive Director of Producer Education



The beef cattle industry continues to provide a safe, high quality and consistent product to consumers by addressing animal health and food safety issues. Management techniques learned over the years, such as crossbreeding, genetic improvement, implants, and nutritional manipulation, have been adopted to improve beef production efficiency. However, one key to ranch success is to develop a record-keeping system to track economic viability and to satisfy consumer desire for more information about production practices.

Why keep records?

Records are needed not only for legal, financial and taxation purposes, but also for maintaining a permanent record of the farm business, analyzing the business, monitoring day-to-day production practices and marketing options, and for future planning.

The two sets of performance records important to commercial production are total herd performance and individual performance. Total herd performance is the combined reproductive and growth performance of each animal in the herd. The keys to total herd performance are:

- Total growth of all individuals in the herd
- The number of open cows
- Length of calving season
- Death loss

Individual cow records should be kept when it is economical and practical to do so. Keep the records uncomplicated by recording only necessary observations. These records should/could include:

- Cow ID (ID can incorporate age)
- Date of first exposure to bull
- Results of pregnancy examination — early (will calve in first 40 days), medium (will calve in next 20 days), late (will calve later than 60 days)
- Dates of first and last calving
- Problems at calving time (pulled calf, weak calf, cow did not claim calf)
- Age at branding, vaccinations, treatment for sickness, antibiotics used weaning dates.
- Weaning weight (if possible; if not, then an estimate of size — large, medium, small)

According to the Beef 2011 (USDA-APHIS), 83 percent of all operations had some form of a record keeping system. Larger operations with more than 200 cows were more likely to have used a record keeping system (95 percent) and also a computer (48 percent). The record keeping program can be as simple as the IRM-Redbook or more complex with the use of a computer — which is a necessity as herd size increases, because analysis of production records without a computer is time consuming and cumbersome.

The following table gives the results of a survey of Montana ranchers evaluating the kinds of records kept and also compares BQA-certified (Beef Quality Assurance) ranchers to non-BQA certified ranchers.

Significant differences were found between BQA certified producers and non-BQA certified producers regarding the types of records maintained on the ranch.

One of the rapidly growing areas that requires thorough record keeping because of consumer demand is third party auditing of ranch production practices (<http://wherefoodcomesfrom.com/what-we-do/programs/>). The following gives a partial list of production practices that can be audited so that ranchers are able to

Comparison of record keeping practices of BQA vs. Non-BQA Certified Montana Producers (Duffey, 2008)

Type of Records Kept	BQA Certified	Not BQA Certified
Animal number and description	86.1	69.0
Vaccination records	84.-	59.5
Calf birth records	7.9	64.7
Animal purchases and sales	77.1	66.4
Cow herd records	73.6	49.1
BQA records	45.0	4.3
Feed records	38.5	25.0
Where animal was born	33.8	23.3
No records kept	3.5	7.8

market into specific programs for added value. All of these programs require auditable records.

Record keeping can help a producer 1) measure and benchmark the herd and operation, 2) analyze output data, 3) make better and more informed

decisions, 4) comply with laws and regulations, 5) document the safety and quality of the beef product and 6) allow for marketing into certified and third

Examples of four certified marketing programs that require third party auditing of ranchers production practices (IMI GLocal, 2015)

Certified Program	Description
Source Verification	Identification and traceability are the cornerstones of this claim
Non-Hormone Treated Cattle (NHTC)	Exporting U.S. beef to any of the 27 countries within the EU requires the product must come from cattle verified cattle verified by a third-party to have never received any hormone growth promotants during their lifecycle.
USDA Grass-fed	The USDA's grass-fed standard requires grass and forage to be the sole feed source consumed for the lifetime of the animal with the exception of milk consumed prior to weaning.
Verified Natural Beef (VNB)	The VNB program allows cattle to be eligible for buyers and brands seeking special speciality markets requiring natural beef. The standard incorporates three prohibited aspects of production — hormone growth promotants, antibiotics and animal by-products.

party audited programs.

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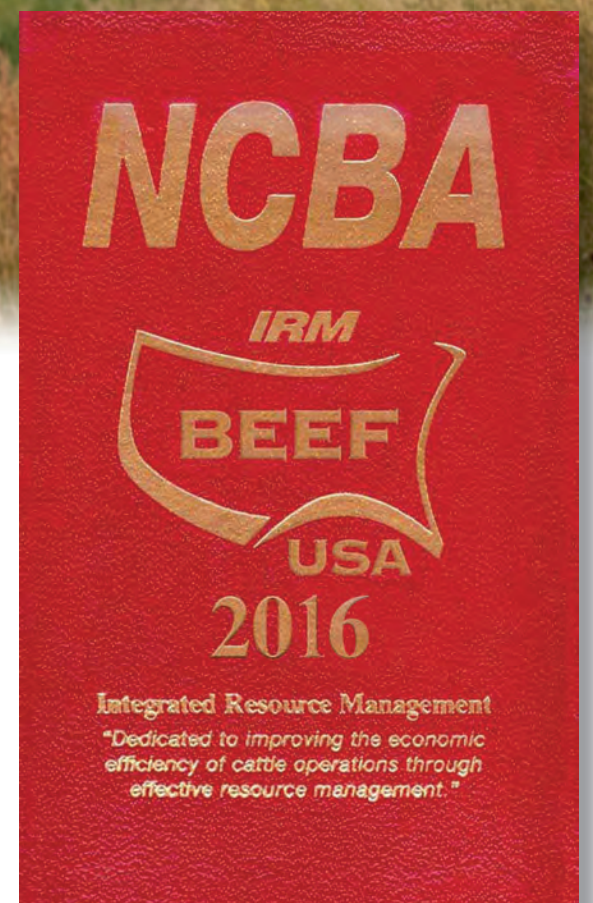
REDBOOK

For over thirty years cattlemen have used the IRM Redbook to enhance profitability by keeping better records, and to track the productivity of their cow-calf operations.

The 2016 Redbook features:

- International Letter Designations for Animal Identification
- Calving records
- Revised Beef Quality Assurance Guidelines
- Injection site quality control
- Health records
- Pasture usage
- SPA (Standardized Performance Analysis) performance measures
- Cattle sales
- AI breeding records
- Analysis of calving activity

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