

Keeping Score

by Tom Field

The cow-calf enterprise can be categorized into a number of separate but interdependent activities. These include nutrition and grazing management, reproductive performance, herd inventory, health management, growth, finances and profitability, and marketing to name some of the key benchmarks. Accurate assessment of performance in these leading indicators is a highly useful tool for managers as they strive to make effective decisions that enhance the long-term profitability of their businesses.

The key to establishing an effective scoring system for these control points is to capture the right data at the right time and to make analytical use of the results. Calculating these formulas requires access to inventory numbers at key times during the production cycle.

For the sake of argument, three key measures will be presented here. **Pregnancy percentage** basically represents the number of cows and



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heifers diagnosed pregnant as a percentage of the all females exposed to mating in the previous breeding season. One adjustment must be made. To arrive at this figure, start with the number of females that are diagnosed pregnant, less any that are sold or die during breeding season. Divide that number by the number of females exposed to mating. Your answer is the pregnancy percentage.

Ideally, this measure should be determined for first and second calf heifers, and the mature cow herd. Evaluated over time, this can help producers identify “red flags” relative to reproductive performance. The shortcoming of pregnancy percentage is that it fails to account for losses during pregnancy.

To figure **calving percentage**, start with the number of females

calved. Divide this by the number of females exposed to mating, minus any that were sold/died from the start of breeding season through calving. The answer is your calving percentage. Developing a trend line of the percent of calves born in each 21 day period of the calving season can help you assess the herd reproductive rate and help identify potential problems.

Reproductive losses between pregnancy diagnosis and calving sends a strong signal that disease or nutritional shortcomings may be impacting the herd. Calving season distributions compared over time provide insight as to potential issues with mismatches of cow size and milk with the available nutrients, disease concerns, nutritional management and problems with the bull battery.

For **weaning percentage** start with the number of calves weaned. Divide this by the number of cows exposed to mating, minus any cows that were sold or died from the start of breeding season through weaning. Your answer gives you survival rates following calving.

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Calving Distribution Table

Year	1st 21 days	2nd 21 days	3rd 21 days	4th 21 days
2007				
2008				
2009				
2010				

Cattle on Feed Down 4 Percent

There were 11 million head of cattle and calves on feed for slaughter market for feedlots with capacity of 1,000 or more head on Oct. 1. This was 4 percent below last year but 5 percent above Oct. 1, 2005. The inventory included 6.83 million steers and steer calves, down 5 percent from the previous year. This group accounted for 62 percent of the total inventory. Heifers and heifer calves accounted for 4.07 million head, down 1 percent from 2006.

September placements in feedlots totaled 2.43

million, 9 percent above 2006 and 3 percent above 2005. Net placements were 2.37 million head. During September, placements of cattle and calves weighing less than 600 pounds were 610,000, 600-699 pounds were 505,000, 700-799 pounds were 570,000, and 800 pounds and greater were 740,000.

Fed cattle marketings during September totaled 1.71 million, 3 percent below 2006 and 6 percent below 2005. This is the second lowest fed cattle marketings for September since the series began in 1996.