

Cow-calf chute-side data collection and reports

John D. Bolinger, DVM

Bolinger Veterinary Service, LLC, Tipton, MO 65081

Abstract

Management event reports can be used to help cow-calf producers make decisions at key points throughout the year. These reports can be created chute-side using an iPad and allow the veterinarian to provide instant information to discuss with producers. This presentation details how tablets are used during farm visits to collect health and performance data, and to generate reports for the producer before leaving the farm.

Key words: cow-calf, data, reports, tablet

Résumé

Les rapports d'évènements de régie peuvent être utilisés afin d'aider les producteurs d'élevage de bovins allaitants à prendre des décisions à des moments clés tout au long de l'année. Ces rapports peuvent être créés auprès des animaux avec un iPad permettant au vétérinaire de fournir de l'information en temps réel pour alimenter la discussion avec les producteurs. Cette présentation précise comment utiliser les tablettes durant les visites à la ferme pour recueillir de l'information sur la santé et la performance et comment produire des rapports pour le producteur avant de quitter la ferme.

Introduction

Management event reports are a tool that allows the veterinarian to capture data during a farm visit/cattle processing event, and turn it into usable information for the producer. For these reports to be most beneficial they should be short, concise, and highlight the important information available for the producer. With that in mind, the report section should be limited to 1 page as people tend to lose focus when given longer reports. Also, try to limit the number of graphs to 1 or 2 per report. With a few data points per animal it is easy to generate a lot of graphs. While more graphs may be interesting and look neat, they can distract away from the truly useful information that is available. It is also important to include a list/table of the individual data that is collected as well. This list can be neatly sorted to make it easier to find a particular individual later on.

Generating and Using Reports in Practice

Management reports can be created at multiple strategic events along the beef cow-calf production cycle. Common

reports would include cow/heifer pregnancy report (can also be used/modified for pre-breeding), calf processing reports, heifer development reports, and bull breeding soundness exams. Examples of these reports are in the PowerPoint presentation. One can also generate reports for individual animal examinations of sick animals, lameness, dystocias, and necropsies. These allow for a complete medical record to be collected for each operation.

Given the portability and durability of tablets, such as iPads, these reports can be generated on the farm by pre-designing templates in a computer spreadsheet program, such as Excel or Numbers. The template is saved in a file, such as Cow Pregnancy Report, which can be copied to a new file and renamed. Thus the templates allow for multiple graphs, tables, and calculations to be included in a report without the need for building a new spreadsheet with each visit. The spreadsheet programs also have features such as AutoSave and Undo that are advantageous when using tablets chute-side. AutoSave will automatically save a file after data has been entered into a field; this is the default in Numbers and can be turned on in Excel. Undo allows the user to "go back" in case one accidentally deletes data or moves data/charts.

Tablets, such as iPads, are able to withstand a rugged work environment when properly equipped. By utilizing cases, such as a LifeProof case, the tablet becomes drop resistant, water-resistant, and dust-resistant, all of which are crucial for chute-side use. Tablets can be sensitive to extreme heat/sunlight and cold. The heat/sunlight is easily avoided by placing the tablet in a shaded area and/or on top of a small cold pack. If it does overheat, they can be quickly cooled in a refrigerator or cooler. Veterinarians are accustomed to keeping vaccines from freezing and similar tricks can be utilized to keep tablets from freezing. In addition to a good case, other essential accessories would include an external battery backup and a stylus.

In order to provide the producer with a copy of the report, one can utilize a small, wireless printer that can be carried in a vehicle. These inexpensive printers generally last a long time and allow for an instant paper copy of the reports. It is also convenient to provide producers with a digital copy of the report. These can be done by emailing a file either as an attachment of the original or as a pdf file that cannot be altered.

Once a veterinarian commits to providing management event reports, the number of files will accumulate quickly. Therefore, it is important to have a good organization method. My preference is to name the file by date, producer name, herd, and event; for example 2017.09.13.rooda.grant.south.ww. Then, I prefer to create a separate file folder for each producer.

This allows the veterinarian to easily go back and review past visits when necessary. A side benefit of all of the reports/files is the ability to create a summary of the reports to be used for benchmarking herds. This allows the veterinarian to track the average performance of herds in the area as well as get a better understanding of the normal variation of production performance.

With these numerous reports, it is also important to avoid accidental file loss through proper data backup protocols. Our protocol involves 4 components: iCloud; the hard drive of the laptop; another Cloud-based backup service; and a local, physical backup. The file is created on the iPad and automatically syncs to the iCloud that allows us to view/edit from the iPad, iPhone or MacBook. Then, at the office, we manually download the file from the iCloud to the hard

drive of a MacBook. Next, we have a Carbonite subscription that is an automated Cloud-based backup service. Lastly, we perform regular, local backup to a jump drive that we keep stored on-site in a safe. It sounds like a lot, but most of it is automated or requires little effort if performed regularly.

Conclusions

With today's technology, health and production data can easily be captured, and useful reports can be generated with little time and effort by the veterinarian. Tablets are relatively inexpensive, and have more than enough capability to collect data and generate reports.

