

# Real Records for Real Cattlemen

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The 1992 publication of the National Cattlemen's Association's Beef Quality Audit, indicating an average unrealized profit potential of \$279.82 per fed beef in the United States now being wasted due to carcass quality defects, has perhaps been the most dramatic recent indication of a widespread and growing awareness among beef producers and a willingness to look objectively and critically at the economic realities of beef production. The Audit grew out of a realization by the industry that ultimately they had to answer to the consumer of their product, and that satisfying that consumer would require implementation of the quality management principles expressed so well by Dr. W. Edwards Deming. Deming's suggestions had been tremendously influential in the outstanding success of the Japanese auto industry, and his principles have been subsequently been incorporated into most successful businesses today. Basically, Deming argued that quality is not the result of an inspector-producer antagonism wherein the producer strives to get his product "past" the inspector, but instead is the result of a continuous improvement process wherein defects and nonconformities are systematically reduced permanently. As these concepts have begun to be accepted by the beef production industry, there is an increasing awareness that the various segments of that industry have not always communicated very well with one another. Indeed, the relationships among the various segments of the industry have sometimes been downright predatory. A significant portion of the "profits" to be had within any one segment often came at the expense of another segment. "Shrink" and "doctoring up realizers" have often substituted for actual production.

The acceptance of the concept of a certain desirable degree of integration within the beef production industry has created a need for increased communication among the segments—i.e. for accurate and dependable records as well as the mechanism for sharing that information. The veterinarian is ideally positioned to help his client implement such records, collect accurate data, and assist in interpreting the conclusions and analyses.

Certainly one of the benefits of combining good records with "good" cattle is to become what some thoughtful beef industry observers have called a "select supplier"—a trusted source of consistent reliable quality

product with no undesirable "surprises".

As the consumer's requirements for certainty increase, and with an eye to our extensively litigious society, good record keeping will certainly come to be viewed as part of your client's "preventive medicine" program.

Another benefit to keeping thorough individual animal health records is the various patterns of evidence of disease or management error that reveal themselves "on paper" but may not be evident "horseback". For example, several years of written records re. calving treatments will often point out that the same dam (and perhaps her daughters) consistently has offspring that require extensive medication or management effort in order to save them. Whether the underlying cause is a genetic susceptibility to infectious disease or some behavioural characteristic that compromises her "mothering" ability is somewhat immaterial from an economic standpoint. Her continued presence in the herd should be reviewed in light of the information. Oftentimes examination of birth weights relative to degrees of dystocia will reveal genetic lines of cattle that have an unacceptably small pelvic area as evidenced by inability to deliver even moderate sized calves. Such information should be utilized in selecting related individuals for replacements and in planning future matings.

Research has indicated that persistently infected BVD individuals often reveal themselves with an exceptionally low adjusted weaning weight. If such an individual's dam has previously had similarly performing calves, it might be economically feasible to test her for persistent infection, as well as examine the animal health program for the management decisions that might have allowed her to become infected intrauterine. Surely the examples of potentially sound economic decisions that could be aided by good records is limited only by the availability of such records and our perception in analyzing them.

*Dr. Weikel showed some examples of the minimal records necessary for a cow/calf or stocker/backgrounder operation - they did not represent all the necessary data accumulation such an operation needs. Dr. Weikel stated that for some purposes, e.g. production parameter measurement and ELDU treatments, individual identification is a necessity. A source of forms and suggestions re. record keeping is the NCA's IRM Desk Record System. We regret Dr. Weikel's selection of records could not be published because of space problems.* Editor