



# Keeping Production Records for the Beef Herd

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## *Introduction*

Production records are essential in evaluating the performance of the cow herd and aiding in making selection decisions. With proper record keeping, evaluations can be made on the reproductive, productive and financial status of the cow herd. Then management and selection practices can be implemented to make improvements where necessary. This fact sheet deals with production and reproduction records.

## *Getting Started*

The first step in keeping production records is to identify each individual cow in the herd. Any combination of identification that is readable from a short distance and permanent is acceptable. Three methods that work well are:

1. Put identical ear tags in each ear of the cow. If one is lost replace it as soon as possible.
2. Put an ear tag in one ear and the corresponding tattoo in the other.
3. Cross-reference ear tag with the cow's Brucellosis or calfhood vaccination tag.

With these methods when a cow inevitably loses a tag, she can still be identified. It is essential to have the cow herd consistently identified to ensure each cow gets proper credit during the lifetime of her production.

The second step is to determine the ages of the cows in the herd. If unknown, mouth the cows or estimate as close as you can. Weaning weights are adjusted based on the age of the cow; therefore, the more accurate your estimate is the more accurate the adjusted weight will be.

Third, record the breed of the cows. If unknown, estimate the breed based on appearance. If she appears to be predominantly of one breed, list her as a cross of that breed (for example: Angus cross, Charolais cross, etc.). If breed composition cannot be determined, list the cow as a Crossbred. This record is not essential, but can provide information on how particular breeds perform in your environment.

## *Breeding Season*

Take a breeding inventory. List all cows and heifers exposed through either natural service or artificial insemination. Record all AI information including identification and breed of the bull(s), tag number of the cow and date of insemination. For natural service, record bull identification and breed, identification of the cows exposed to that bull, and the dates when the bulls were turned out and removed. This information is extremely important in determining the reproductive performance of the herd. Calving and weaning percentages are based on the number of females exposed to the bull.

## *Pregnancy Test*

Pregnancy information helps to identify which females didn't conceive so culling options are available sooner. Also, this information helps to determine whether pregnancy problems are occurring. If a larger number of the females are pregnant at the pregnancy test but do not calve, losses during pregnancy due to disease or malnutrition are likely occurring and can be corrected.

## *Calving*

Observing calving can provide useful information and assist in avoiding calving losses. Information obtained at calving

is essential to good record keeping and includes:

1. Calving date (required). The exact date may not be known if cattle are not checked daily, but estimates within three days are acceptable.
2. Proper identification of calf and matching with female. If calf identification is not done at birth, it must be done prior to weaning. If done at some time other than birth, an easy way to match calves with cows is to separate the calves from the cows for a few hours then turn them back together. Generally they will nurse right away and easily can be matched.
3. Calving ease score (very useful). The scoring system is: 1—unassisted, 2—easy pull, 3—hard or mechanical pull, 4—cesarian section, 5—abnormal presentation. If unobserved but no problems apparent, score a 1.
4. Birth weight (useful). If unknown, BIF recommends using 70 lbs., which is the value used by most computer programs.

## *Weaning*

Production records are of little value without a weaning weight. If you do not own a scale, many county organizations have them available. Check with your county Extension agent for more details. The following information can be collected at weaning.

1. Individual weaning weight and date (essential).
2. Weight and condition score of the cow (very useful).
3. Sex of the calf (essential). If the calf is castrated prior to weaning record as a steer, if castrated at weaning record as a bull.

4. Management code (essential). See Table 1. This is a code associated with the Cow Herd Appraisal Program (CHAPS).
5. Contemporary code (essential). All calves raised under the same conditions receive the same contemporary group code. If a group of calves (or their dams) get preferential treatment, they should get a different contemporary code. Producers that have spring and fall calving herds should use different contemporary group codes for each herd.
6. Frame score (hip height) and calf grade are optional entries.

### *Yearling*

If calves are to be kept through one year of age, whether to market at that time or be retained as replacements, additional records can be beneficial. The following information is needed:

1. Individual yearling weight and date (essential).
2. Sex of calf (essential).
3. Contemporary code (essential). Same as with weaning weights.

### *Other Data*

Many producers may find other information useful. If so, this information should be recorded. The production goals of each operation will be different, and records should reflect those goals.

### *Using the Information*

Performance records are only beneficial if they are incorporated in management-making decisions. Records must be recorded accurately, analyzed and interpreted. From the interpretation, informed decisions on selection and management practices can be made. These decisions become more economically sound if financial information is available and can be incorporated.

The information in this article corresponds with the Cow Herd Appraisal Program, which is a computerized records keeping system supported by the University of Kentucky Cooperative Extension Service. For more information on CHAPS, contact your county Extension agent for agriculture.

**Table 1: Management Codes**

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0	No creep feed
1-7	Months actually creep fed
A	Cow exposed but did not calve
B	Cow aborted
C	Calf died during delivery or before two weeks of age
D	Calf died after two weeks, but before weaning
E	Embryo transplant calf
F	Cow loses own calf; calf is purchased and transplanted onto her; enter the dead calf's birth date
K	Calf within your herd that is transplanted onto another cow; i.e., twin calf or calf with dead dam
S	Twin raised on own dam as a single
T	Twin raised on own dam with other twin
X	If crucial information is unknown; i.e., birth date (00/00/YR) or weaning weight
P	Purchased cow/calf pair

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